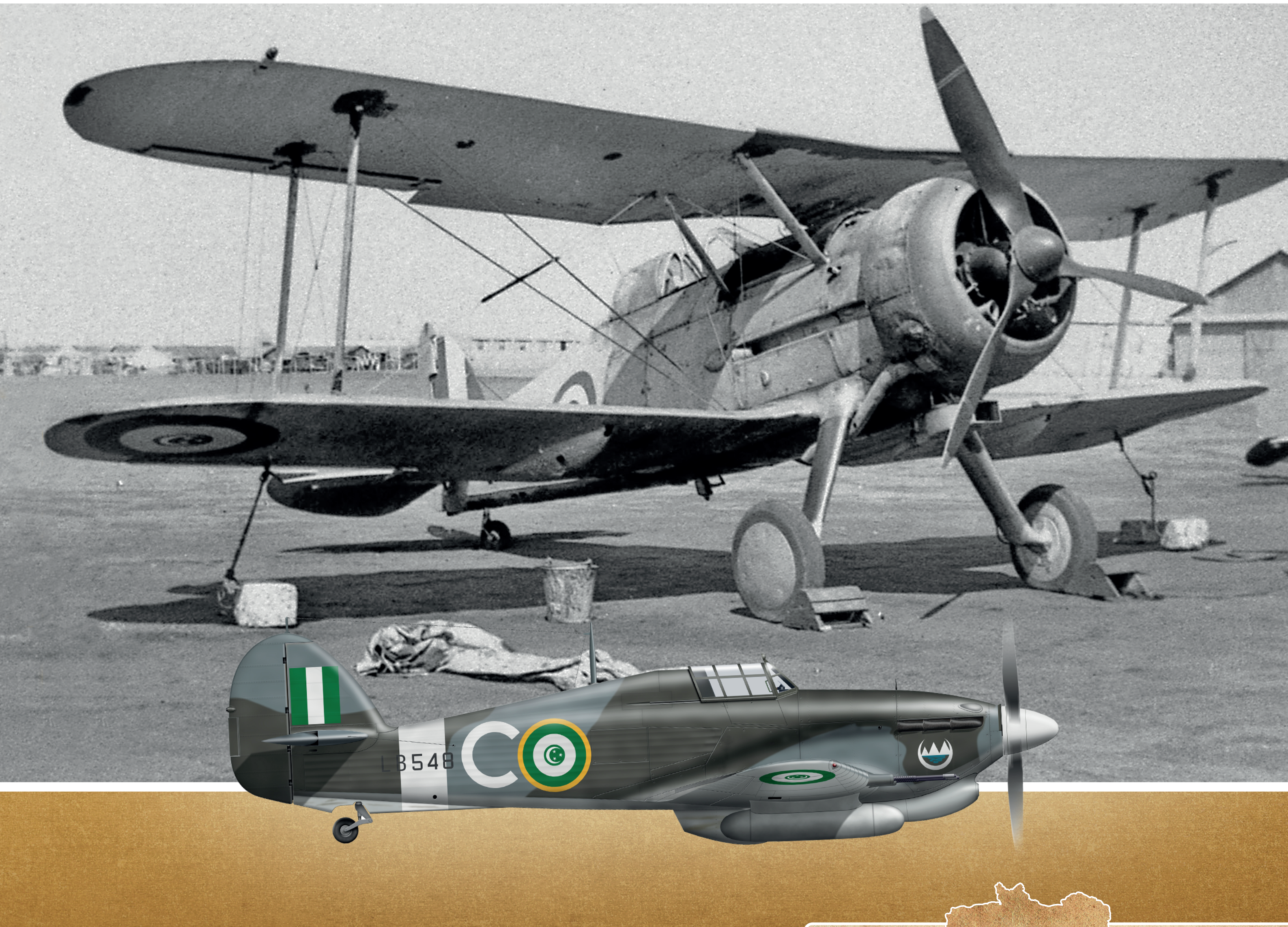
MIDDLE EAST@WAR 54

AIR POWER AND THE ARAB WORLD

1909-1955

VOLUME 8: THE REVIVAL IN EGYPT AND IRAQ, 1943-1945



Dr David Nicolle &
Air Vice Marshal Gabr Ali Gabr

MIDDLE EAST @WAR SERIES

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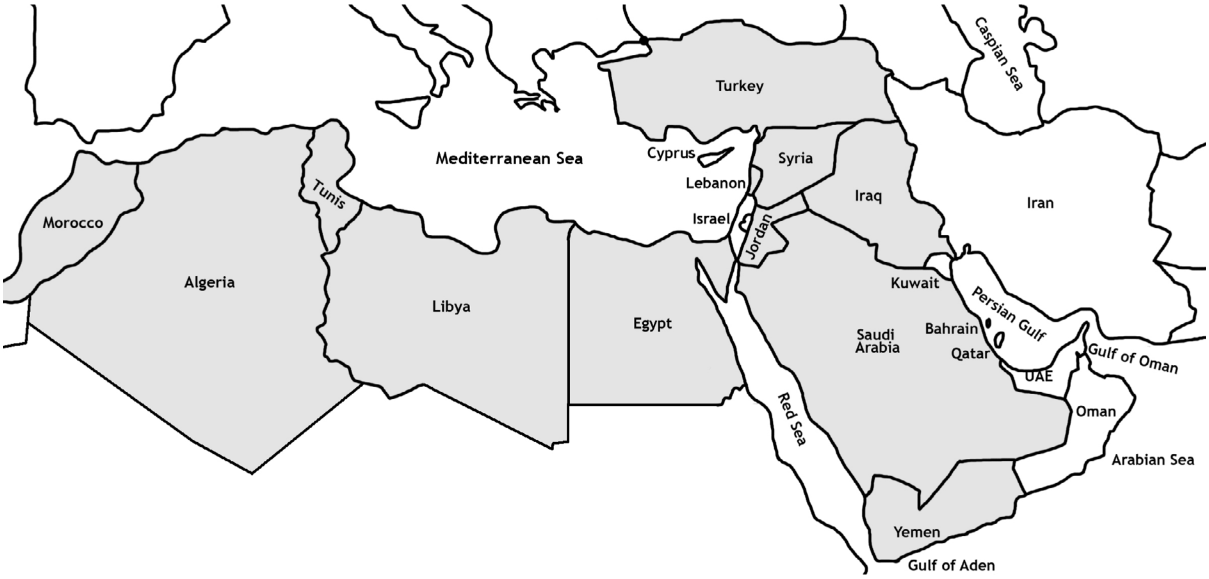
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DEDICATION

For Air Commodore Abd al-Moneim Miqaati (8 July 1904 – 5 April 1982)
in memory of a meeting in Groppi's in 1970.

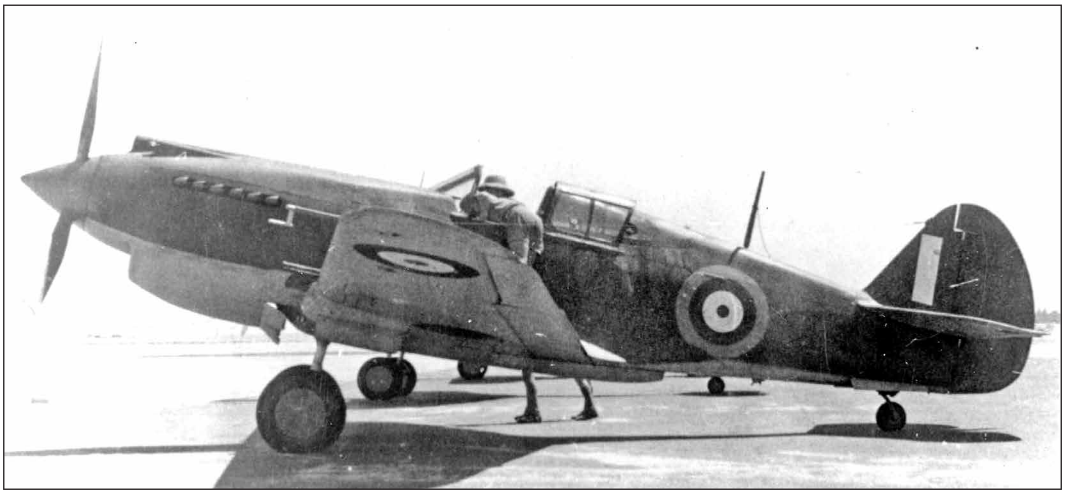
It can be said that once Europe had shed her colonies, it became a healthier and happier place. The same could not, alas, be said of all her former colonial possessions.
— (Michael Howard, *War in European History*, Oxford, 2009)

INTRODUCTION: A NEW MIDDLE EAST?

EGYPT

By the start of 1943 the Allied position in North Africa had stabilised and in May that year Axis forces were expelled altogether. Back in Egypt the political landscape also began to change. Here the Communist Party was almost entirely confined to industrial workers where it had a limited following, though the party also had a small number of supporters in the Egyptian Army. Not until the final years of King Faruq's reign would the Communist Party of Egypt become a significant factor, rising from an estimated 500 to around 5,000 members. Meanwhile the long established Wafd Party, initially created to work for Egyptian independence through political means, found its credibility eroded because its leader, Mustafa Nahas, had been installed as Prime Minister "with British bayonets" following the Abdin Palace Affair of 1942. The Wafd's opponents even accused it of becoming pro-British or "pro-imperialist", despite Prime Minister Nahas Pasha's efforts to bring the existing Arab states together politically, eventually resulting in the creation of the Arab League on 22 March 1945.

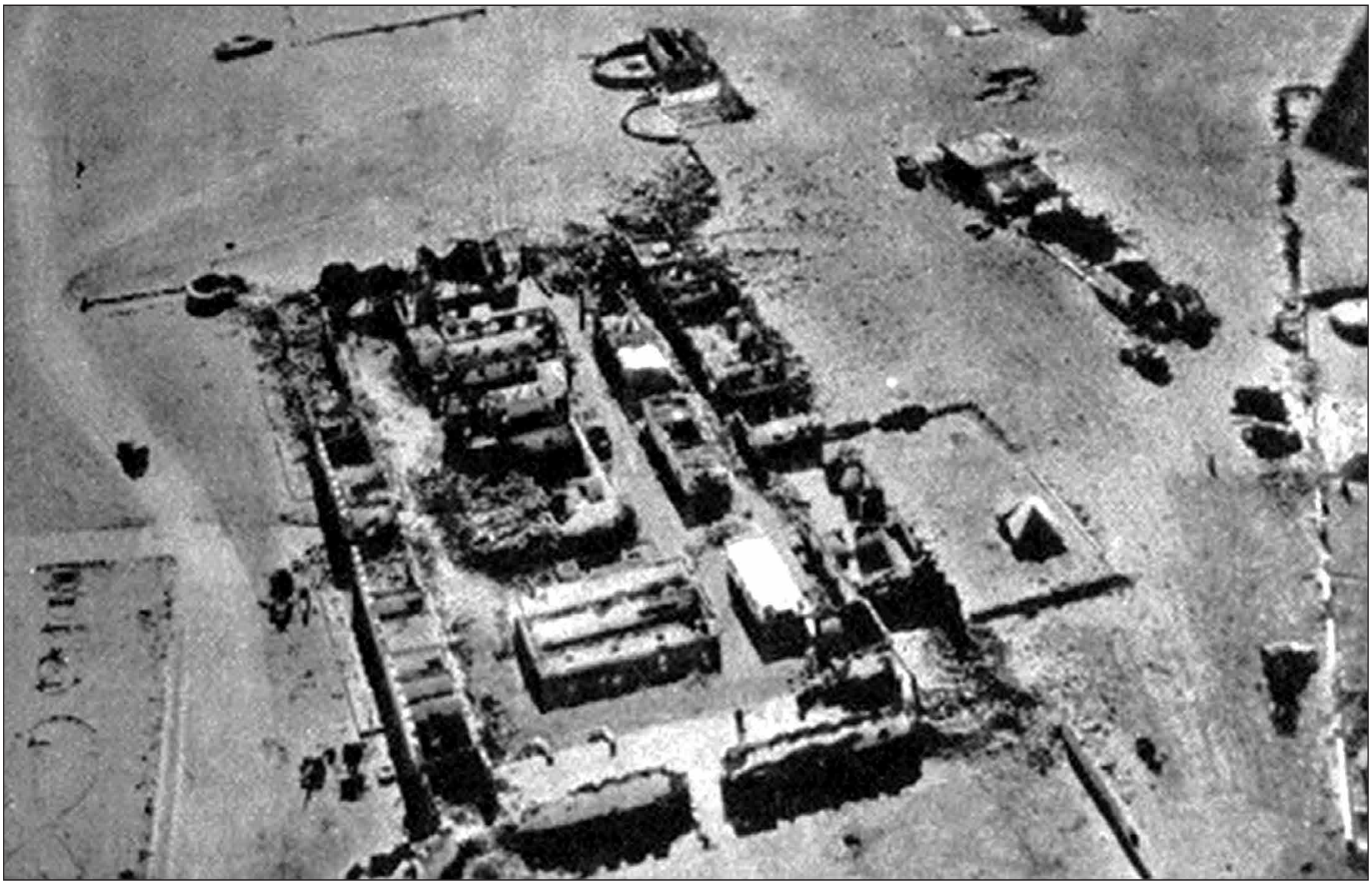
The Helmy Aerogypt Mk. IV (G-AFFG) was a later form of the aeroplane designed by Salih Helmi before the Second World War. Rebuilt in the UK during the conflict, it no longer had an additional high-lift aerofoil and landing flap on top of the fuselage but had a new tricycle undercarriage. (David Nicolle collection)


A Curtiss P-40 Tomahawk of the RAF in Egypt, where several British and Imperial fighter squadrons were equipped with the type. A number of worn, and in some cases considerably repaired, P-40s would subsequently be transferred to the REAF which had nothing but problems with them. (Albert Grandolini collection)

Meanwhile the Abdin Palace Affair continued to be regarded by substantial sections of the Egyptian elite as more than humiliating for Egypt and its King, but almost as a case of British military aggression. This in turn led to a social boycott of the British by many educated Egyptians in Cairo and Alexandria. The British became aware of such social isolation, but in most cases failed to understand why, regarding themselves and their allies as the saviours of Egypt – and indeed of the world – from Nazi and Fascist aggression. Similarly, in 1942 and well into 1943 the British government feared that the way the Abdin Palace Crisis had been handled might cause parts of the Arab world to support the Axis powers, emotionally if not in concrete terms.

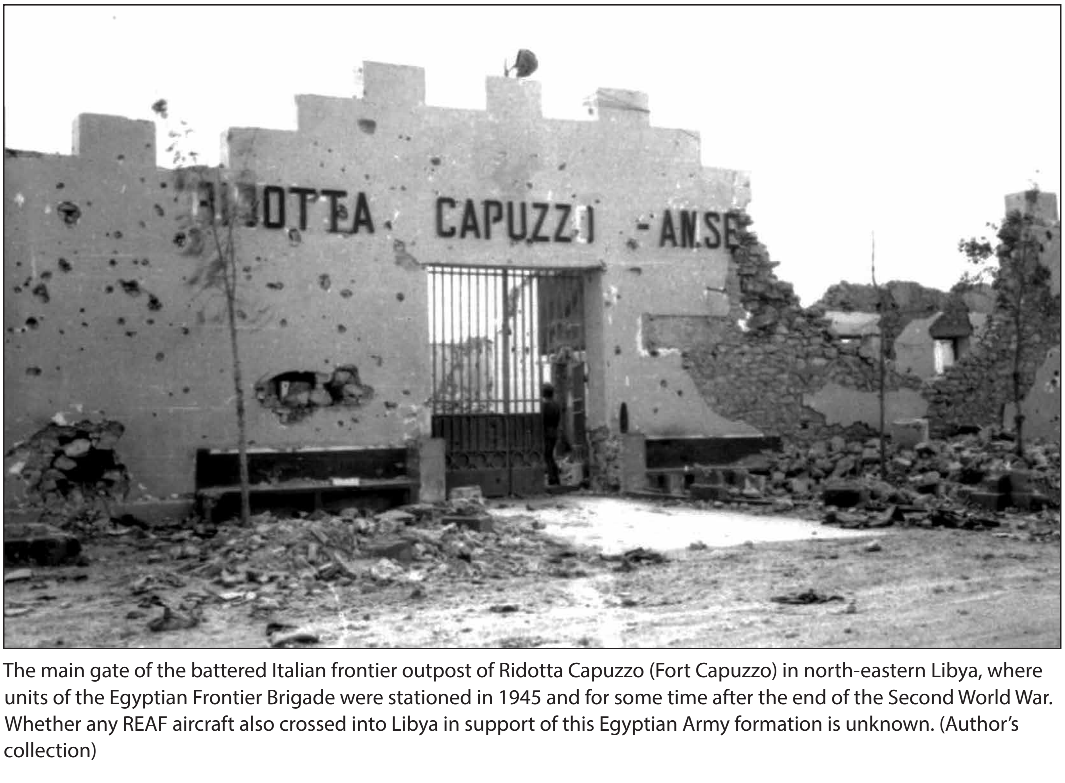
IRAQ

In Iraq, Mustafa Barzani broke free of his internal exile in Sulaymaniyah in Iraqi Kurdistan and stirred the Kurdish tribes into yet another revolt against the authority of Baghdad. It became clear that, if Iraqi armed forces were to



During the final year of the Second World War, the Egyptian Frontier Brigade's responsibilities were extended into north-eastern Libya, around the war-ravaged ex-Italian Fort Capuzzo which is seen here from the air. Among its duties was supervising the collection of the military material which lay abandoned in the desert. The Frontier Brigade was, in fact, the only Egyptian Army formation to serve outside Egypt or the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan during the Second World War. (Albert Grandolini collection)

combat such uprisings effectively, the British would have to assist the renewal of the RIrAF still further. This outbreak of Kurdish disaffection in northern Iraq in 1945 was triggered by the new Iraqi Prime Minister Hamdi al-Pachachi (in office 4 June 1944 – 23 February 1948) ignoring some aspects of a fragile agreement between the government in Baghdad and the Kurdish leadership. This time, however, the incorrigible Shaikh Mustafa Barzani's revolt was speedily crushed by the Iraqi Army with close and effective support from a revived RIrAF.



The main gate of the battered Italian frontier outpost of Ridotta Capuzzo (Fort Capuzzo) in north-eastern Libya, where units of the Egyptian Frontier Brigade were stationed in 1945 and for some time after the end of the Second World War. Whether any REAF aircraft also crossed into Libya in support of this Egyptian Army formation is unknown. (Author's collection)

Thus, in October 1945, Mustafa Barzani and some 3,000 dedicated supporters fled into Persia/Iran where Kurdish nationalists, guided and supported by Soviet occupation forces, were attempting to establish a Kurdish state in the north-west of the country. The Second World War may have recently ended with Nazi Germany surrendering on 8 May 1945 and Japan doing so on 2 September, but a new era of post-war tensions and conflicts was already emerging, eventually becoming the so-called Cold War.

Also in 1945 the Iraqi Regent, Prince Abd al-Ilah, visited the USA where he was honoured at the first state dinner to be hosted by the new First Lady, Bess Truman. Iraq declared war on the Axis powers almost at the last moment and, in so

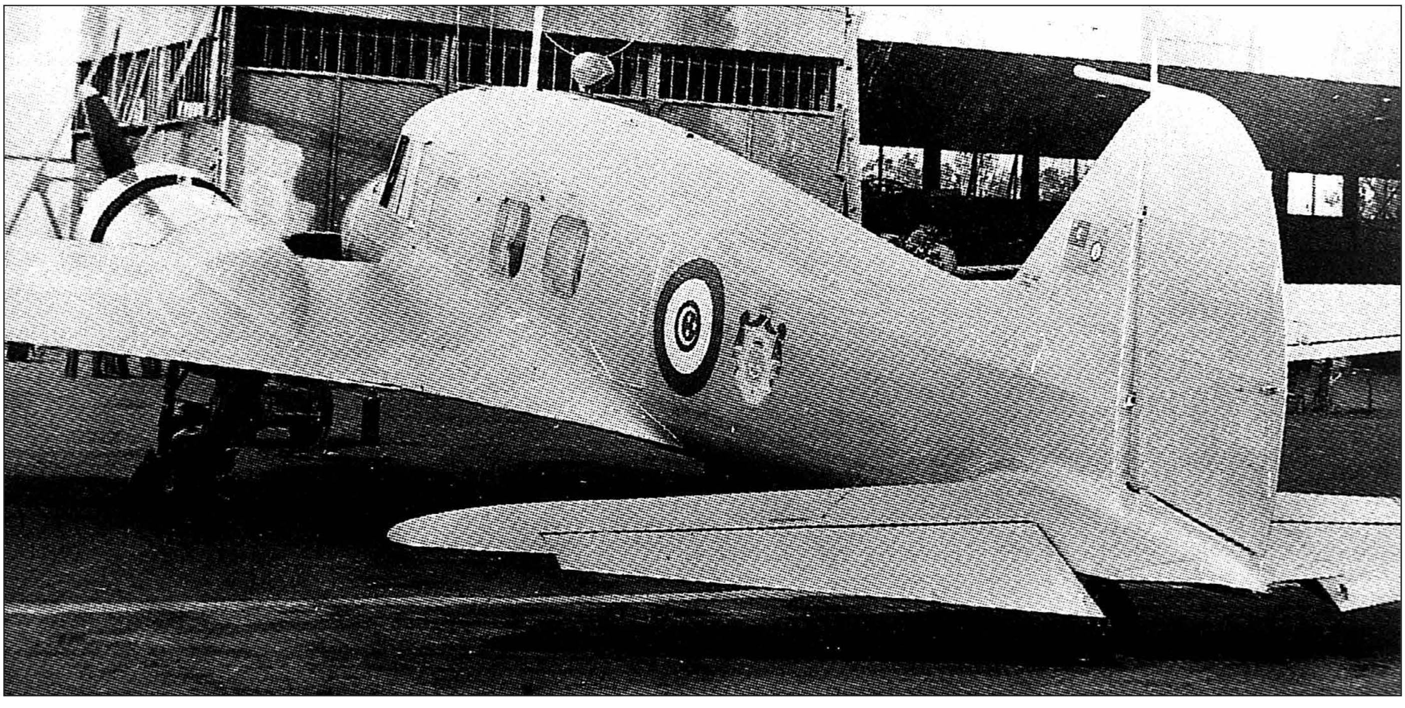
After the North African campaign moved west, away from Egypt, Egyptian anti-aircraft defences returned to their training routine, assisted by men of the British Advisory Mission. The latter included Major Frank Mason, seen here (right) in 1945 with *Sagh* Muhammad Mujib (left) and *Qa'im-maqam* Hassan Bay Rashid, the CO of anti-aircraft artillery in Port Said (centre). (Frank Mason archive)

doing, was able to join the new United Nations Organization. Even though in May 1945 Iraq also became a founding member of the Arab League with Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Transjordan, the Iraqi government remained at arms' length from the cause of Arab nationalism. Instead, the Baghdad government insisted on retaining its close association with the United Kingdom. Earlier, Iraq had proposed the formation of a Federation of Arab States under its own leadership, to include Palestine which was currently still under a British mandate. However, this was opposed by the United Kingdom, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and most Arab states, even including Transjordan which was ruled by a member of the same royal family as Iraq. Only then did Iraq somewhat grudgingly agree to join the Arab League.

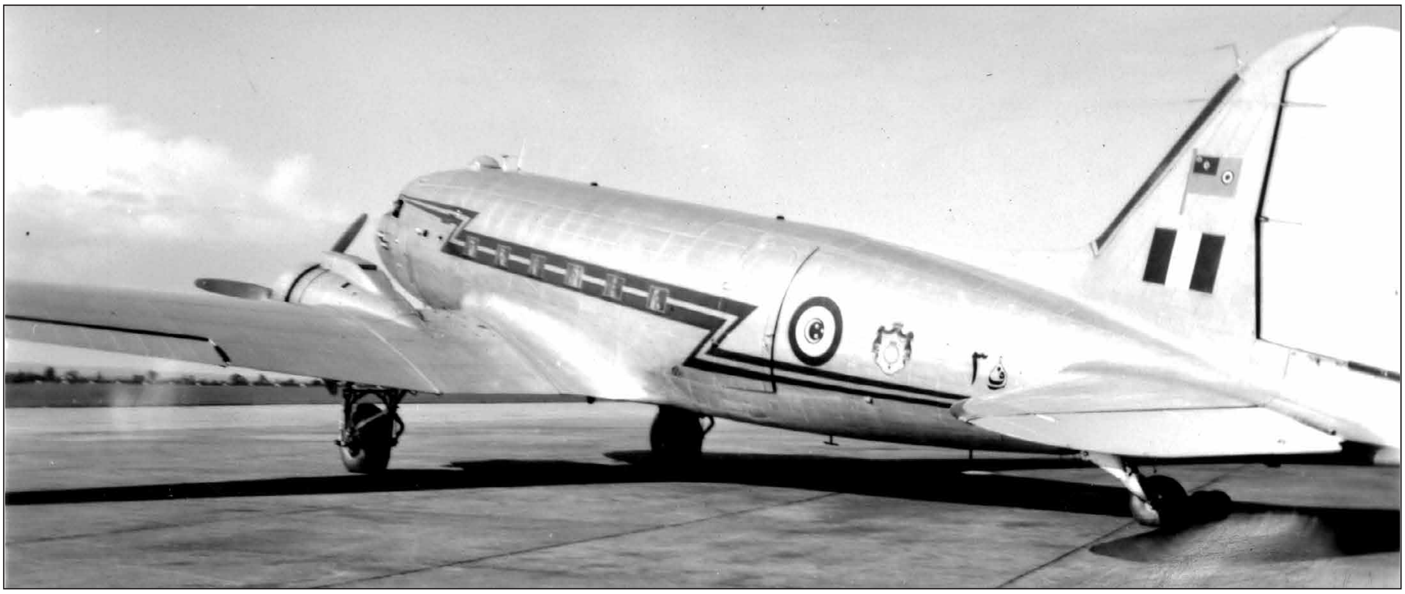
SYRIA AND LEBANON

Sadly, the period from mid-1943 to the end of the Second World War had been characterised by disagreement and bickering about the forthcoming transfer of authority from a French administration to that of the existing Syrian and Lebanese governments. As the Second World War drew to its bitter close in Europe, France's influence in the Levant was ebbing fast. In Syria, frequent clashes flared up between French troops and a hastily assembled militia of Syrian police and armed civilians, culminating in a particularly

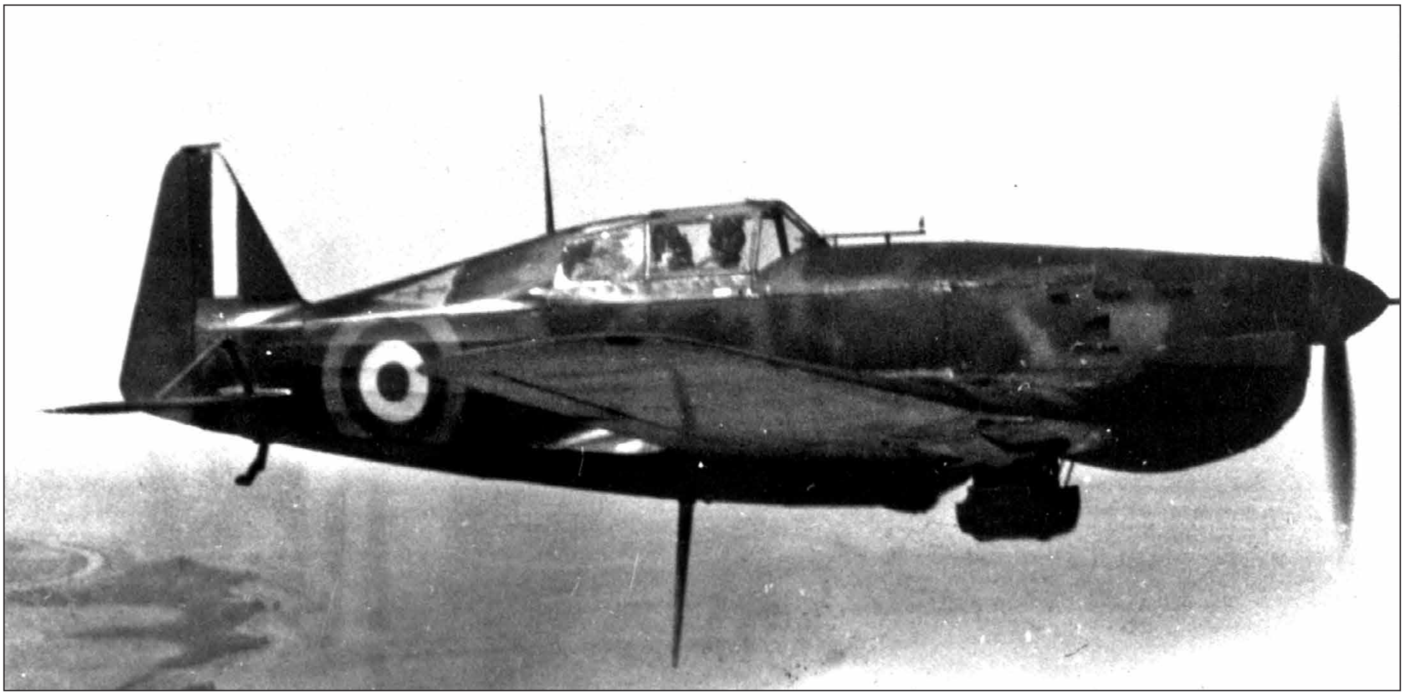
Qa'im-Maqam Hassan Bay Rashid, the CO of Egyptian Army anti-aircraft and searchlight batteries at Port Said, photographed at the end of the Second World War. Despite the fact that, like so many senior Egyptian officers, he was accused of being a member of the "fat brigade", Hassan Bay Rashid was a highly effective commander according to his colleagues in the British Advisory Mission. (Frank Mason archive)



Late in 1944 the British gave a "luxuriously appointed" Avro Anson 19 (described in some documents as an Anson 12) to King Faruq to form part of the REAF's Royal Flight. Though this was done with considerable fanfare, the British gesture fell flat because the USA then donated a significantly more luxurious Douglas C-47 Dakota. (Author's collection)



The REAF Royal Flight's American Douglas C-47 Dakota (serial number F3) was undoubtedly a more impressive gift than the UK's offer of an Anson 19, which the author can confirm could be a noisy and draughty machine. King Faruq's Dakota clocked up a considerable air-mileage, here being photographed at Dublin Airport on 4 June 1949. (J. Masterson photograph)



Morane Saulnier MS 406 of the Free French Air Force in Egypt, but with British markings. The Morane's Free French identity is shown by a triangular shield bearing the Cross of Lorraine, above the RAF roundels on the fuselage. (P. Cortet photograph)

serious crisis in May 1945 when the French refused to transfer control of locally recruited armed forces to the Syrian government. This led to further disorder and a three-day French artillery and aerial bombardment of Damascus, killing an estimated 400 people and inflicting widespread damage, even within the historic Old City.

Shocked by this French use of heavy weaponry and air power, and worried that a British lack of action would look like collusion, the British government decided that enough was enough. Additional British forces were ordered into Syria from Jordan and were instructed to fire upon their French allies if necessary – the Second World War had, of course, not yet ended. When British armoured cars and troops entered the Syrian capital, they were welcomed almost as liberators and, accepting the inevitable, the French authorities ordered their troops back to barracks. This extraordinary crisis almost brought Britain and France to the point of war but, as the author found during many visits to Syria, the British role has been effectively written out of the history taught in Syrian schools. Meanwhile, tensions remained on the streets of Syrian cities – as did foreign troops.

OTHER ARAB LANDS

Internal and inter-Arab politics did not cease during the Second World War. Rivalries and divisions which sometimes amounted to feuds between Arab states had typified their pre-war relations. These continued through the war years and were certainly not ended by the establishment of the Arab League. Meanwhile only Iraq and Egypt had locally significant air forces, but these nominally independent states remained under differing degrees of British control.

While there was almost no active defiance of the British within the Aden Protectorate during the later war years, a persistent famine in the Wadi Hadramawt region worsened in 1944. Consequently, the RAF was again called upon, but this time its crews were not ordered

An Egyptian heavy anti-aircraft gun at target practice outside Port Said in 1945. (Frank Mason archive)

to bomb "rebels" but instead to fly grain to the hardest hit areas. It should nevertheless be noted that elsewhere in their Empire, the British used air power against actively dissident subject peoples with even greater ruthlessness during the Second World War than they had between the World Wars.

Meanwhile, cultural and very limited political contacts between Yemen and Egypt remained another potential source of concern for the British. During the early 1940s a few high-profile Yemeni personalities went to Cairo and remained there for some time. It has been suggested that they came under the influence of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood with whom they were likely to have found some common ground, despite various differences between the Sunni Islam of the Brotherhood and the Shi'a Islam of the Yemeni Imamate. Paradoxically, several of these visiting Yemenis eventually returned to Yemen enthused by ideas of modernisation – if still within a very traditional Islamic context. Several then found themselves promptly arrested on the orders of the Yemeni ruler who now distrusted anything even remotely "modern".

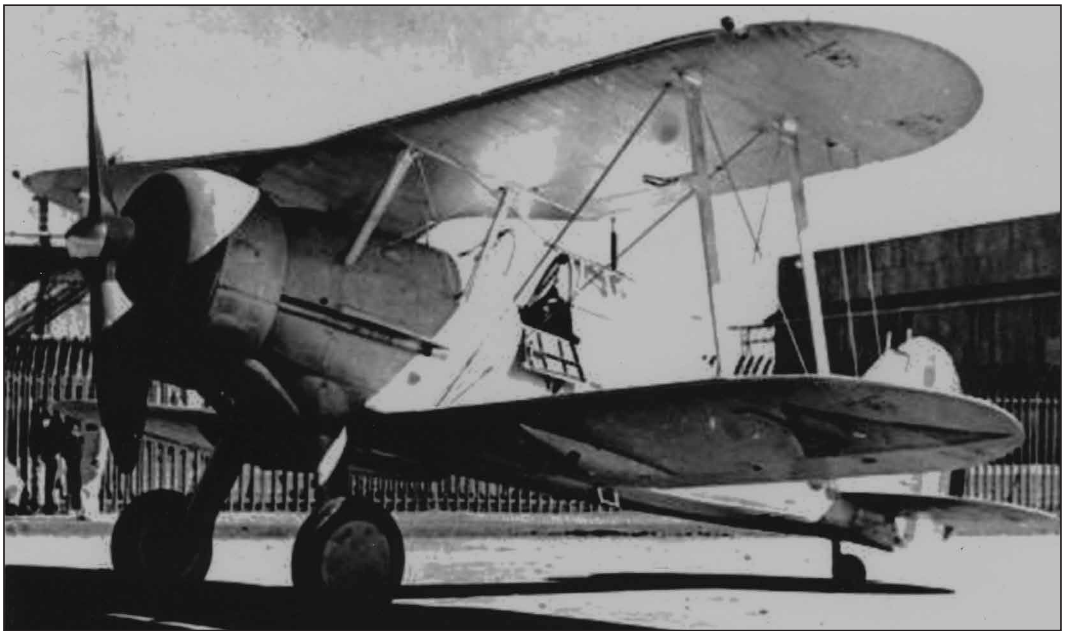
1

THE REVIVAL OF THE ROYAL IRAQI AIR FORCE

The RIrAF's chronic lack of spare parts now meant that the Iraqis had to revert to cannibalisation, even where their Gladiators were concerned. As a result, although they were allocated serial numbers 151 to 180, only 10 of the Gladiator Mk. I/II biplanes passed to Baghdad in 1943–44 were used operationally. In fact, the six grounded ex-RAF Gladiators handed over in July 1943 were specifically intended as a source of spares. In recognition of this fact, the prices demanded for these archaic machines were nominal – five Gladiators in September 1943 at £500 each, followed by six in December at only £200 each. Nevertheless, difficulties in finding sufficient transport to take the aeroplanes to Iraq overland meant that five were made airworthy by the RAF in Egypt, so that they could be flown to Iraq in late May 1944. These were reportedly the only ones which the RIrAF's No. 4 Squadron subsequently flew operationally.

Al-Liwa al-Tayar al-Rakan Sami Abd al-Fattah was Commander of the Royal Iraqi Air Force from 1941 until 1954. He thus remained in post much longer than any of his Egyptian colleagues, providing the RIrAF with an element of continuity denied to the REAF. (Iraqi Air Force archive)

There were a few changes in the command structure of the RIrAF during 1943 but, according to British sources, the only commissioned men to be promoted were a small number of junior officers. In fact, it appears that promotions in the Iraqi military were less regular than in the Egyptian military, though this might have reflected the rather peculiar situation in which the Iraqi Army and Air Force found themselves as they struggled to rebuild after the Anglo-Iraqi War of May 1941. Organisationally, the entire RIrAF was still based at Mu'askar al-Rashid, apart from the Headquarters located in the Ministry of Defence in central Baghdad and No. 4 Squadron stationed at Kirkuk. The force as a whole was currently so small that it was run like a single Wing. Another handicap which reflected Iraqi and indeed wider Arab military culture, was that the Officer Commanding the RIrAF, *Muqaddam* Sami Abd al-Fattah, was unable to delegate decision making. As Advisory Mission



Six of the RIrAF's Gloster Gladiator Mk. Is survived the Anglo-Iraqi War relatively undamaged, and these were integrated into No. 7 Squadron which would for a while be the Iraqi Air Force's only operational unit. Whether this was one of them is unclear, as the British took away three before eventually handing over a small number of replacements from March 1942 onwards, to rebuild the disbanded No. 4 Squadron. (Tom Cooper collection)

Report No. 41 put it; "Very little is ever done unless the CO gives a direct order and detailed instructions".

The RIrAF's nominal order of battle had barely changed by the end of September 1943. In February that year the force had 65 (or 55 according to another source) pilots and, of these, five were not employed in flying duties. Even so, there were not enough serviceable aeroplanes for them to fly as often as they should. This in turn led to a decline in morale and "keenness" in the opinion of the Advisory Mission whose Report No. 42, dated 7 September 1943, maintained that the RIrAF had too many officers. Furthermore; "It is the poor type of officer and their complete lack of interest in anything connected with flying or in the men that is the major reason for the present pathetic state of the Air Force. I suggest that there should be a drastic weeding out of the worst officers". The author of this report did not, however, identify those he considered should be "weeded".

On the other hand, subsequent events showed that RIrAF officers and pilots included some of the highest calibre. One such was Arif Abd al-Razzaq. Born at Kubaysah near Ramadi in the Anbar province of western Iraq in 1924, he entered the Military College in the tumultuous year of 1941. Even before graduation Abd al-Razzaq was sent to learn to fly in the UK, followed by an air navigation course in Britain. As a *Mulazim Awal Tayyar* (First Lieutenant Pilot) he joined the RIrAF towards the end of 1943; one of a draft of six new pilots. After training as a staff officer, Arif Abd al-Razzaq would himself command the RIrAF's training squadron, eventually rising to command the Iraqi Air Force as a whole.

The training of new personnel was a difficult matter for the RIrAF which currently only had three Tiger Moths for preliminary instruction, though 14 remaining Nisrs were soon transferred to the Flying Training Squadron (FTS). Once these Nisrs had gone to the FTS, the RIrAF's operational squadrons had just 21 aircraft. Furthermore, the 10 new pilots who were due to graduate from the Flying Training School had an average of only 160 flying hours flying on Tiger Moths and just four on Nisrs. The Commanding Officer of the RIrAF had, in fact, been advised not to train more pilots for a while and by the end of February 1943 there had been no recent intake into the FTS. Instead, a small number of men would be sent to the United Kingdom for training in October; the original plan being to send eight.

Early in September 1943 the next Advisory Mission Report complained that;

> There has been a tendency to select senior pilots for the visits to Egypt (to accompany the Regent and Prime Minister) and other places, thus depriving squadron pilots of valuable experience …. There is no need to train pilots in Iraq at the present time as the Air Force has too many pilots already. The eight officers being sent to England for training will be sufficient to meet requirements for some time and I hope they will return to Iraq at the time when the Air Force is receiving new aeroplanes and that there will be a chance of the Air Force benefitting from their training.

Arif Abd al-Razzaq was probably one of these lucky few.

Most of the RIrAF's aeroplanes were survivors of the May 1941 war; the only ones which could be used for live firing being Nisrs and Gladiators. The Nisrs were also the only machines that could be used for any sort of bombing or aerial photography. The British Advisory Mission therefore recommended that these two types should be the last to be replaced. In fact, the six Gladiators (of which five were serviceable) were due to be joined by two further ex-RAF machines. Early in 1943 the British offered Iraq a further five Gladiators for No. 4 Squadron. The Iraqi government hesitated before accepting such an old type, but the Advisory Mission urged them to do so because, although outdated, the Gladiators were cheap and remained useful for the roles they were expected to undertake.

There were also still eight Douglas 8A-4s (seven serviceable) but their use was severely limited because of a lack of spare parts, plus four Breda Ba 65s (all serviceable). The Iraqis' only De Havilland Rapide was currently having its 500 flying hours inspection. Finally, there were now 13 Tiger Moths, but only five were serviceable. The Nisrs soldiered on with No. 1 Squadron, helped by the fact that new or spare propellers had been received. Indeed, these sturdy and reliable aeroplanes were expected to continue to play a useful role in training even after being replaced as frontline aircraft.

What the Mission envisaged was that No. 4 Squadron should have a total of 16 Gladiators, of which four would be kept in reserve, and eventually the Iraqi authorities agreed. As a result, the following ex-RAF aircraft were transferred to the RIrAF: N5858, N5830 and N5857 delivered on 1 March 1943, N5780 and N5825 delivered on 1 June 1943. They were purchased by Iraq from RAF stocks in North Africa but the problem remained of how to get them to Iraq. The Iraqis lacked large vehicles to carry them overland, so it was decided that they should fly. The Gladiators were thoroughly overhauled by the RAF in Egypt before setting off for an anticipated six-hour flight across the desert. The British Advisory Mission was also surprised to find that, following the loss of the RIrAF's surviving Rapide which was burned out while being refuelled after a test flight, another Rapide fuselage was found tucked away at the back of a hanger. Furthermore, this was in good enough condition to be repaired.

The Mission now blamed a "lack of foresight" by the Iraqis for a current lack of equipment for the remaining Douglas bombers. In reality most of the missing material had been ordered, but had failed to arrive because of being impounded by the British. Even the lack of cameras does seem to have been an oversight on the part of the RIrAF. As of early 1943, none of the Douglases were fitted with guns; some now lacking bomb-racks while only one had a wireless. The author of the British Advisory Mission Report continued to condemn the Bredas as "quite useless either for operations or training and I consider it a waste of effort to continue with the struggle to keep two or three of them serviceable. I recommend that the squadron is disbanded". Nevertheless, at the end of September 1943 the RIrAF's Order of Battle still stood at 12 Gladiators (six serviceable), 17 Nisrs (seven serviceable), 12 Douglas 8A-4s (seven serviceable), five Breda 65s (two serviceable), one Vincent (serviceable), one De Havilland Dragon (unserviceable) and 13 Tiger Moths (five serviceable).

According to the "section reports" of the Advisory Mission, flying hours per month at the FTS had ranged from approximately 70 hours 30 minutes in December 1942 to just nine hours in July 1943, though it had risen again to 20 hours five minutes in August. Much of this would probably have been flown by qualified officers who needed to keep up their hours.

No. 1 Squadron's flying time had fluctuated even more, ranging from 127 and a half hours in January 1943, down to just 26 and three-quarters in August 1943. This was, of course, influenced by the unit's operational duties as well as the serviceability of its aeroplanes.

No. 4 (Fighter) Squadron at Kirkuk got a new CO in 1943, Major Nadim al-Aidy who remained in post until 1946. According to the Advisory Mission Report of 28 February 1943, a serious effort had been put into improving this squadron which now had 11 Gladiators and 12 pilots. For a while it also had an RAF advisor attached, Flight Lieutenant Weachter, who supervised some "useful training" although, almost inevitably, the Mission Report feared that standards would slip after Weachter returned to Baghdad. Meanwhile No. 4 Squadron's flying time again fluctuated a great deal, from only 11 and a quarter hours in January to no fewer than 110 hours 50 minutes in June 1943. The very low flying time at the start of the year may have been associated with a serious accident on 9 January when a Gladiator and a Hawker Nisr of No. 4 Squadron collided in the air while landing at Kirkuk. They fell on the western side of the aerodrome. The Gladiator pilot, *Mulazim Awal Tayyar* Salih Mahdi al-Wazzan was killed, along with the pilot and observer of the Nisr, *Mulazim Awal Tayyar* Ibrahim Adham Mustafa and *Jundi Darjat Awal Qilas* Ahmad al-Shaikh Salih.

At the start of 1943 No. 5 (Fighter-Bomber) still had few pilots qualified to fly the Breda Ba 65. Again, the British Advisory Mission's tendency to blame the Italians for many of the RIrAF's shortcomings is plain in the Advisory Mission Report. This time, however, it was the Italian instructor rather than the Italian machine which was the target;

> It appears that the Italian instructor, who came to Iraq when they were purchased gave them the impression that they were difficult to fly and this belief has been encouraged by the few pilots who have been flying them. It is an entirely wrong impression and during the first half of this period six pilots were given dual [showing that at least one of the trainer versions of the Breda had survived the May 1941 War] and sent solo. The rest of the pilots became keen to fly them but this was impossible owing to the very low serviceability in the squadron and as soon as the British personnel transferred their attention to another squadron the amount of flying dropped to almost nothing.

This was reflected in the flying hours of No. 5 Squadron, which went from a monthly average of around 10 hours during November 1942 to January 1943, down to 15 minutes in July.

No. 6 Squadron currently did not exist, but No. 7 (Fighter-Bomber) with Douglas 8A-4s got a new CO; Lieutenant Colonel Hafzi Aziz taking over on 3 February 1943. He would remain in command until 27 January 1946. Under his leadership the squadron's flying time increased considerably, from an average of under four and a half hours per month during November to January, down to just under one and a half in March, up to 36 and a half in April, then to over 70 hours in May, July and August 1943.

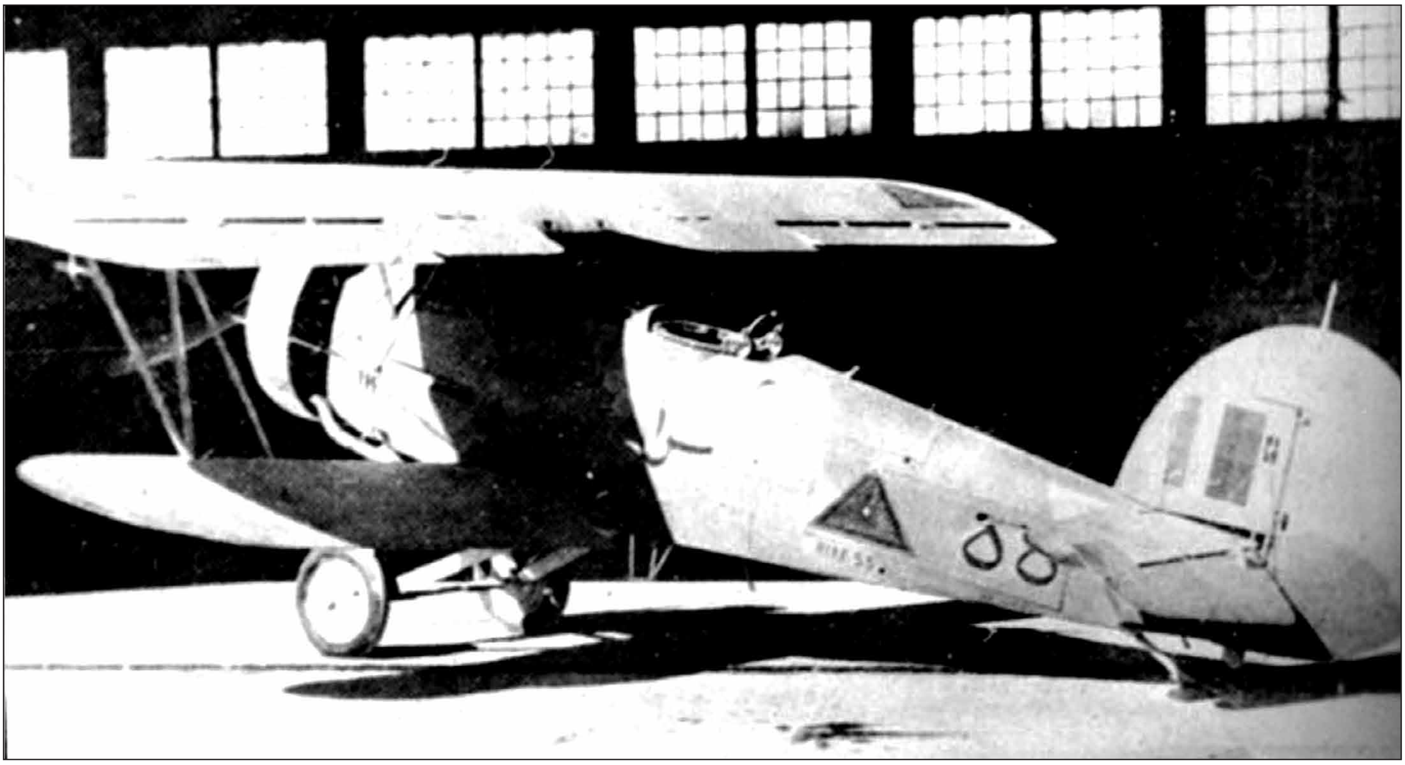
It is refreshing to read the Advisory Mission's comments about discipline in the RIrAF during the early part of 1943, in contrast to what had sometimes been said earlier. Thus, the report of 28 February 1943 stated that; "The standard of flying discipline has been good, and no bad cases of breaches of flying discipline have been reported [despite the serious crash in No. 4 Squadron on 9 January which resulted in three fatalities]. The general discipline appears to be good and the Commanding Officer is trying hard to raise the standard".

Unfortunately, the next report, dated 30 September 1943, was less positive;

> There has been one bad breach of flying discipline. The pilot concerned flew under the King Faisal bridge in the centre of Baghdad, and he has now been forbidden to fly. Apart from this the standard of flying discipline has been fair … The general discipline is fair but very few of the officers set a good example and until this is put right no improvement can be expected. The Commanding Officer is trying to improve the discipline but in most cases he takes action himself and short circuits his subordinate commanders, who will consequently never improve.

There were four accidents in the six months leading up to the Advisory Mission Report of 30 September 1943, though none of them was as serious as that earlier in the year. Neither fatalities nor reported injuries were suffered. The report described some of these events in detail, clearly intending to highlight failures in leadership, flying discipline or maintenance standards. It stated;

> A Breda was crashed at Baghdad due to a heavy landing, the aeroplane being damaged beyond repair. Two Audax were overturned, one due to rain falling while the pilot was away from the landing ground on patrol and making part of the surface soft. The second Audax crashed when the pilot attempted to carry out a precautionary landing because of bad weather. The wind was stormy and gusty at the time and the pilot failed to land into wind. The fourth accident occurred at Amman when the pilot made a heavy landing and broke the starboard undercarriage of the Douglas in which he was escorting HE The Prime Minister on his return from Cairo. The Rapide was burned out while being refuelled after a test flight following a 500 hour inspection. It appears that the fire was due to a discharge of static electricity as the petrol funnel was not properly bonded. In addition to these



One of the RIrAF's Hawker Iraqi Audaxes which survived the disastrous conflict in May 1941 was number 55, here seen later in the Second World War by which time it had been painted an overall camouflage scheme. (Albert Grandolini collection)

> accidents an engine change had to be undertaken at Nagrat Saiman [unidentified]. The aeroplane was a Dougles 8A-4 (Cyclone G.R.1820). A drop in oil pressure was noticed during flight and on landing the oil filter was examined and small pieces of metal were found. In spite of this the Flight Commander [ordered] the fitter to clean the filter and then flew the aeroplane again, with the result that the engine had to be returned to workshops where it is being stripped down.

Although there were no "real operations", as the Advisory Mission put it, during the winter of 1942–43, three RIrAF detachments were sent to isolated desert areas to help the Iraqi Army Police halt sheep from being smuggled across the frontier into Saudi Arabia. It was hardly an epic in the history of aviation, but it did provide those pilots involved with additional experience beyond flying circuits around their own airfields. In each case two aeroplanes were sent to Ba'ash (unidentified), al-Salman and Nukhaib in the deserts of south-western Iraq. The only other operations of note had been when the Regent, Prince Abd al-Ilah was flown to and from Mosul and Irbil on a number of occasions.

Later in 1943, the Kurdish Shaikh Mustafa Barzani yet again stirred up a rebellion in the Kurdish northern regions of Iraq. This time the rising was sufficiently serious for the British to decide that the RIrAF had to be strengthened urgently. Before that could be done, however, the available flying units needed to support the Iraqi Army as best they could. Thus both No. 1 (Army Cooperation) and No. 4 (Fighter) Squadron were committed to this role from 9 October to 20 December 1943. It was carried out successfully, without loss.

The Iraqis' archaic machines were far from easy to maintain, standards of maintenance not having been helped by the fact that, in the opinion of the Advisory Mission, the Apprentices School had produced tradesmen whose technical standards were low. The training courses were therefore revised. Furthermore, the available maintenance crews were needed to repair aeroplanes which had been damaged at Mu'askar al-Rashid during the previous year's flood. Then there was the problem caused by Iraq having purchased aeroplanes from several different countries. As the report of 28 February 1943 stated;

> There are, however, several technical difficulties to be overcome, e.g. the Douglas aircraft can only carry American bombs and none of these are held by the RIrAF. An aeroplane is at present at Habbaniya [which was still a British RAF air base] being fitted with a British type universal carrier. All efforts to fit the Bendix radio sets purchased from America into the Douglas aircraft have failed. Arrangements are now being made for an American representative to help in this work.

Potentially even more dangerous was the fact the RIrAF's stores contained some remarkably old munitions, as the report explained; "Some unsafe bombs were disposed of and a further inspection shows that there are some bombs which are unsafe. Some of these are dated 1918". Over two years later there was another survey of the RIrAF's stocks of bombs and ammunition which this time found that most of what was available was Italian.

Given the threat posed by Mustafa Barzani in the north, and the British decision to revive the RIrAF as a serious fighting force, the British Advisory Mission's report of 30 September 1943 – which was primarily for the eyes of the British Air and Foreign Ministries – passed on an outline plan which had been suggested by *Aqid* Sami Abd al-Fattah, the Commanding Officer of the RIrAF. This was included in the report's concluding summary; "The OC RIrAF had previously made a suggestion that the Iraqi Air Force should consist of 10 squadrons of which 4 would be Fighter, 3 Light Bomber, 2 Army Co-operation and 1 Communications. He suggested that the communications squadron should have 10 aeroplanes and the remainder 15".

The cost of such an expanded air force was considered prohibitive, so the Advisory Mission offered a counter-suggestion which envisaged a force of two squadrons of unspecified single-engine aeroplanes, two of twin-engine machines, and one communications flight. The squadrons should have 10 aeroplanes apiece, while the communications flight should have two single-engine and three twin-engine aeroplanes. The Mission also came up with the radical suggestion that the RIrAF did not need its own Flying Training School because it already had plenty of pilots while future training needs could be undertaken in the United Kingdom. This would, of course, have made the RIrAF a hostage to continuing good relations between Iraq and Britain – or put another way – the British would have effective control over the future development of the Iraqi Air Force. The British also suggested making some changes to the RIrAF's current promotion structure in which advancement was very slow.

Despite its defeat in the Anglo-Iraqi War of May 1941, the Iraqi Army soon had to return to its traditional role of patrolling the mountainous north and east of the country, using what remained of its already outdated equipment. (Albert Grandolini collection)

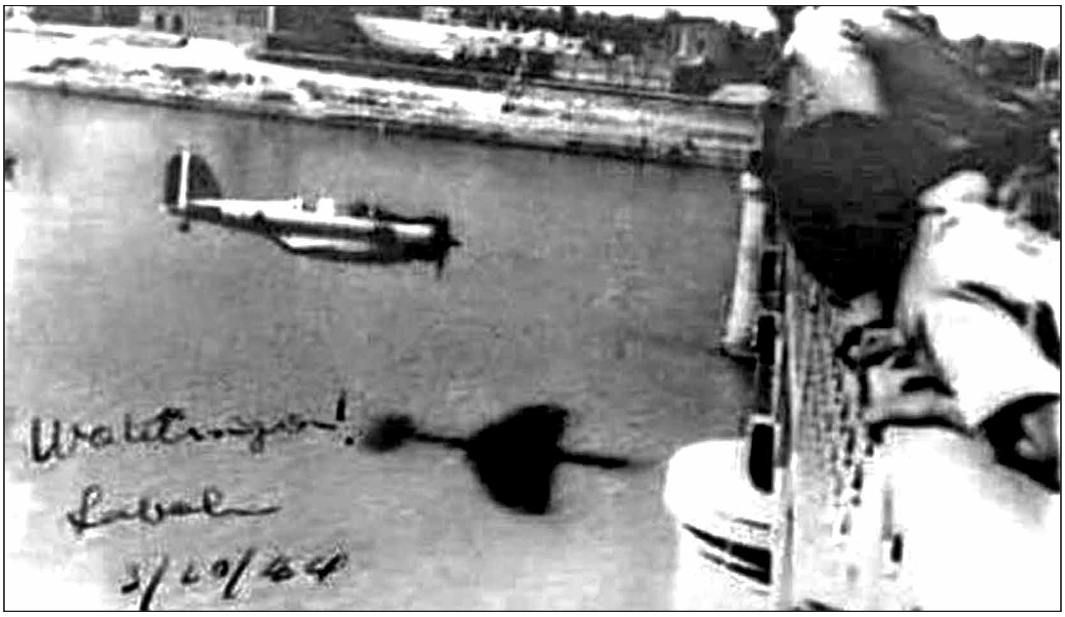
By late 1943 the British were sufficiently confident of victory in the Second World War to start thinking about what would happen after that conflict was over. There was an assumption, typical of the time, that Britain would remain the dominant power in the Arab Middle East and so it was assumed that Britain would play a major role in the post-war development of the Iraqi Air Force. Thus Wing Commander M.H. Rhys of the British Military Mission wrote that;

> Unless a long term policy is adopted I cannot see how the RIrAF can improve. It is possible that the British Government will offer to sell aeroplanes to Iraq at greatly reduced prices immediately after the war and there will be a strong temptation to accept these and build up a much larger Air Force than the country can maintain … If the aim is to build up a small but efficient Air Force a considerable increase in British personnel will be necessary and I consider that they will have to act in an executive and not an advisory capacity.

Events would show that such ideas belonged to the past, not the future, of the Middle East.

Meanwhile the personnel of the British Advisory Mission were occasionally changed. For example, from January to March 1943 there were six RAF NCOs seconded to the RIrAF, three new men being appointed as the contracts of three others terminated, and on 17 June 1943 Sergeant Mackie was recalled to active service with the RAF. He was a highly experienced man, having enlisted in the RAF back on 30 July 1935. Several other members were almost equally experienced, including a man named Vipond who had joined the RAF in February 1936, Ogden who had enlisted in May 1939, and Fernley who had enlisted in June 1939. Fernley had sought a divorce from his wife after he was seconded to Iraq, but whether or not this showed the strain on relationships caused by such distant duties is unknown. At the end of 1943 all RAF personnel in the British Advisory Mission were either regulars, of whom there were eight, or RAF Volunteer Reserve of whom there was one, or RAF Auxiliary Reserve of whom there was also one.

In May 1944 the Advisory Mission came to the probably justifiable conclusion that what the British regarded as a lack of initiative on the part of the RIrAF's senior officers was a result of a "system" rather than weaknesses on the part of the men themselves. This in turn led the British to start laying some of the blame on the Commanding Officer, Sami Fattah. He was undeniably a strong personality who had developed the unfortunate habit of dealing with everything himself, however trivial the matter in question. As the Mission Report of 31 May 1945 would put it; "This has produced the inevitable result of the Station and Squadron Commanders becoming to rely more and more upon their Commanding Officer …. Furthermore, the Commanding Officer himself [Sami Fattah],



Only three of Iraq's Douglas Northrop 8A-4D dive-bombers survived the Anglo-Iraq war. One is seen here flying under one of the bridges over the Euphrates on 20 March 1944. The pilot involved was, not surprisingly, grounded for a while after this stunt. (Ali Tobchi collection)

has to refer innumerable matters, sometimes quite trivial, to higher authority [in the Iraqi government] and this influence is felt throughout the entire Air Force". Though decision making was certainly not paralysed, it was and would remain slow. Indeed, such habits would remain a curse for most Arab air forces.

The plan previously drawn up by the British Advisory Mission early in July 1944 was accepted by the Iraqi government in September, at least in general terms. It was then put into practice, though slowly. Some of the problems seemed simple enough, but may have sapped aircrew morale. For example, on 2 November 1944 civilian parachute packers were recruited while the RIrAF's own existing three packers were sent on a parachute packing course. Quite why the three existing men needed a new course was not mentioned. Then there were continuing questions about the RIrAF's existing aerodromes. Al-Diwaniya airfield was surveyed as a possible new home for No. 7 (Fighter-Bomber) Squadron, but would need time and work before this unit's Douglas aircraft could operate from here. Meanwhile the Iraqis wanted full control of Mosul aerodrome returned; it having been placed under largely British control after the Anglo-Iraqi War.

The plan to modernise the RIrAF inevitably faced difficulties when it came to upgrading its equipment. Any "new" aircraft would be second-hand ex-RAF machines while the scrapping of existing equipment had to be authorised from the very top. Pilots and other aircrew needed to be trained on new machines, as did maintenance personnel. However, Sami Fattah was sent to the USA to attend the International Civil Aviation Congress, largely for political reasons, just at a time when his presence was most required at home.

By the end of 1944, No. 4 Squadron's acquisition of five more ex-RAF Gladiator Mk. IIs meant that the unit's archaic Hawker Nisrs could at last be transferred to the FTS. Operating just one type also improved the squadron's efficiency. Some of these ancient machines would actually take part in the Palestine War and two would still be flying at Mosul in 1949. Old but versatile, Gladiators proved very useful against Kurdish "rebels", especially after some or all of them were fitted with bomb-racks.

On 9 September 1944, approval had been given for the purchase of 30 Avro Ansons to equip or reequip Nos. 1 and 7 Squadrons in a General-Purpose role. These squadrons currently operated Nisrs and Douglases. Furthermore, the RAF agreed to lend the RIrAF two dual-control Ansons to train the pilots in question, the first of which arrived on 8 November 1944. Four Ansons were thus taken over from the RAF on 24 November 1944 while a further 11 set off from the UK in February 1945. Meanwhile, in order to prepare for the Anson aircraft, *Ra'is* Jasim Muhammad, an Engineer Officer, was sent to RAF Middle East Command in Egypt where he was put through a course at the Check and Conversion Unit at Bilbeis as well as a Maintenance Course. These old Ansons were central to the entire project of reorganising the Iraqi Air Force; 33 of them being delivered to the RIrAF between 1944 and 1947. Like some of the Gladiators, they would later play a role during the Palestine War in 1948.

On the other hand, the Iraqi government did not accept the Advisory Mission's suggestion that the RIrAF needed no Flying Training School of its own. Instead, the FTS was renamed as the Training Squadron while apparently also having a communications role. It was then proposed that the remaining Nisrs and Douglases of Nos. 1 and 7 Squadrons be transferred to this unit after they received Ansons.

The Advisory Mission Reports for 1944 offered much less detailed information about the RIrAF's other units than had previous reports, seemingly not even mentioning the loss of a Douglas 8A-4 which crashed while training in low-level combat and killing its pilot Captain Abd al-Rahman Abd al-Wahab. It did, however, record that No. 5 Squadron, until now still flying Breda Ba 65s, was disbanded in December 1944 and its personnel distributed around other squadrons.

The RIrAF took part in a greater number of operations, both training and combat, during 1944 than it had in the previous year. The first was when three Nisrs were sent to cooperate with Iraqi Army artillery from the 1st Division at al-Diwaniya from 3rd to 6 October. It was, nevertheless, marred by the fact that ground-air wireless communication failed on the second day of the exercise. During another exercise from 20th to 23 November, several RIrAF officers were attached to the Army as advisors and liaison personnel at Nasiriyah. The Iraqis did not apparently take part in an air display put on by the RAF at Baghdad on 12th and 13 October 1944. Also involving ground displays, march pasts and music, it was attended by the young Iraqi King and his government ministers and, according to the British Foreign Office, was a great success.

More ambitious were a series of connected exercises involving the RIrAF and the Iraqi Army in central and southern Iraq, lasting from 6th to 20 December. These were significant enough for the Advisory Mission to describe them in detail in its Half Yearly Report No. 45 of 31 May 1945. Named Operations Ali Baba, Shahrazad and Cumparsita, all were premised upon the theoretical danger of hostile tribesmen taking control of a certain area, cutting railway and other communications, and threatening pro-government villages.

Before Exercise Cumparsita, al-Diwaniya airfield had to be equipped with supplies of fuel and bombs. These preparations were carried out by 10 RIrAF officers under *Muqaddam* Sabah and Captain Jasim (Jassam), with something over 200 men under their command. During this exercise the role of the RIrAF was to carry out reconnaissance of specified areas and roads, then to report movements of "enemy" horsemen. The aircraft were next to "bomb" designated targets to soften "enemy resistance" prior to a final attack. The aeroplanes similarly dropped supplies to the Iraqi Army Brigade Group which formed the "friendly" ground forces in Exercise Cumparsita. The RIrAF flew Air Pins which entailed an aeroplane circling an enemy unit to show nearby ground forces the foes' precise location. The pilots of No. 4 Gladiator Squadron were, nevertheless, thrown into Exercise Cumparsita with very little prior experience of reconnaissance work.

Certain aspects of these operations were considered unsatisfactory, especially the "bombing" carried out by Nos. 1 and 7 Squadrons. As the Advisory Mission Report stated;

> The tactics adopted throughout 'Ali Baba' and 'Shahrazad' left a good deal to be desired as the pilots invariably attacked into the sun and always from exactly the same direction. In all cases, with the exception of their final attack on Hammar during 'Cumparsita', the timing was excellent, however, and the times laid down by the Operations Room were strictly adhered [to]. The final attack on Hammar was late solely due to the order issued by the RIrAF Staff who received the order to attack at 1225 and ordered the Douglas Squadron to be over the target at 1330 [which was too soon to be possible]. They could give no explanation for this. The first order for bombing during 'Ali Baba' was received at 0830 and No. 7 Squadron were over the target 45 minutes later which is excellent. The attacks I [the observer from the British Advisory Mission] actually saw or took part in were carried out in a determined manner and I am sure good results would have been achieved in practice [in a real combat situation].

During these ambitious exercises, the participating RIrAF squadrons were further expected to carry out supply drops under primitive conditions. This the crews of Nos. 1 and 7 Squadrons did simply by throwing sacks of supplies from the rear cockpits of their aircraft. The results were far from satisfactory, with many of the supplies being ruined. According to the Advisory Report this was either because they were dropped from too low and therefore "still had considerable forward speed" which does not make sense, or the sacks were not strong enough which seems much more likely.

Supply drops using parachutes were left to recently arrived Ansons of No. 1 Squadron, but again a lack of experience resulted in errors. For example, the lead aeroplane approached too low and so some parachutes did not have time to open fully. Also, some containers landed at a considerable distance from the landing strip which was their target due to faulty releases from the aeroplane. Similarly, the Air Pins carried out by No. 4 Squadron were not a great success because the pilots circled their targets at too great a distance. In reality a determined enemy would have been able to escape. This was put down to the pilots not fully understanding what they were doing. During these exercises wireless communication with ground forces was again poor because the pilots of No. 4 Squadron lacked suitable training. Meanwhile Tiger Moths and the surviving Vickers Vincent were used for communications work.

Comments on these three related exercises in the Advisory Mission Report No. 45 of 31 May 1945 were nevertheless positive;

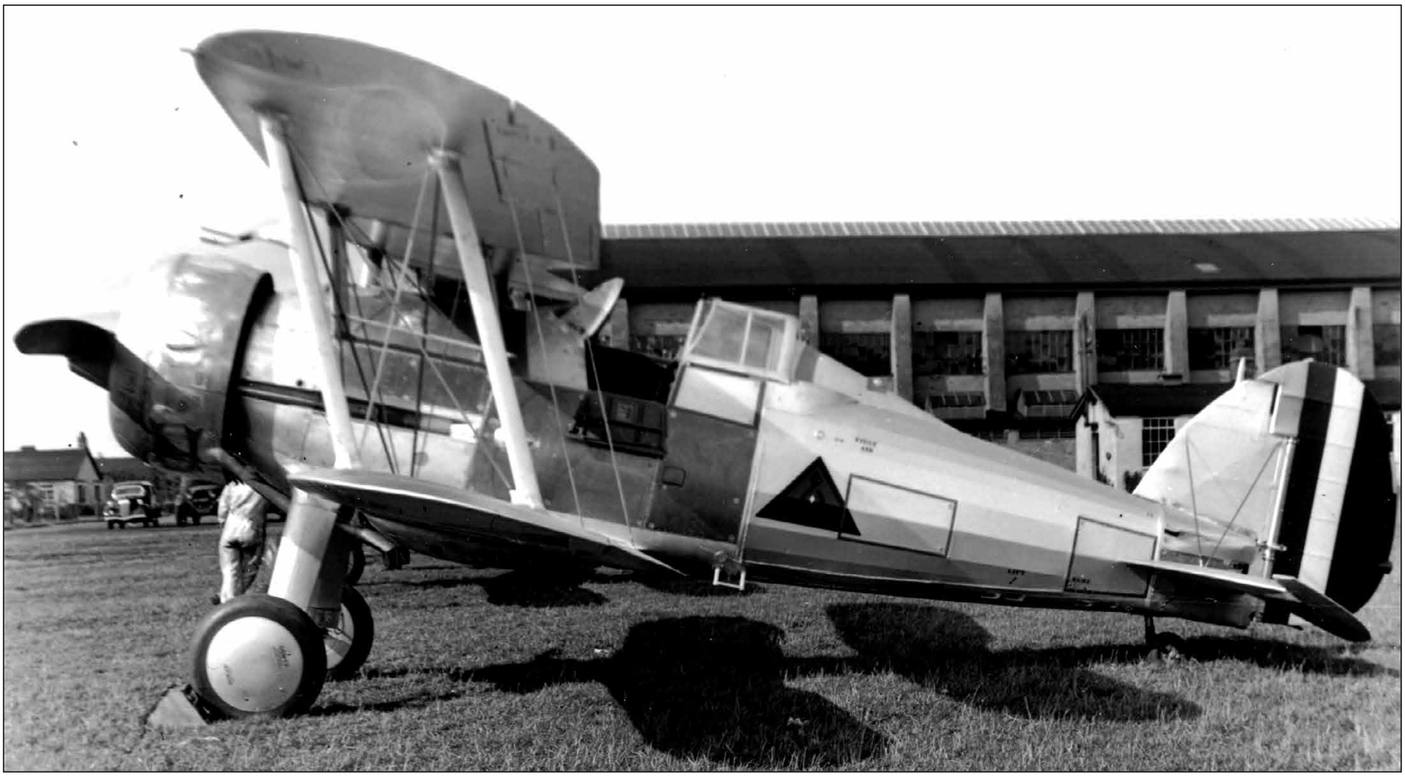
> The exercises were of great value to the RIrAF especially as they brought out the fact that the pilots can undertake work of an operational nature if called upon to do so in open country. It was also very noticeable how the efficiency of all concerned increased when operating away from Baghdad …. This was the first time more than one squadron has operated away from Baghdad at a time, which shows up the administrative side of the Royal Iraqi Air Force in a very good light.

The report then considered questions of morale and how it had improved; "Football and volley ball matches were arranged …. The standard of flying discipline was very high and there were no accidents. 335 hours flying were carried out. With the exception of one Gladiator, all 26 aircraft were kept serviceable throughout".

As the Second World War approached its climactic conclusion in Europe and the Far East, the year 1945 saw the RIrAF continue to develop, and to be involved in some real military action. In fact, a few days before the Second World War ended, the RIqAF started its first major operations since the Anglo-Iraqi War of May 1941. These would continue after peace came to most of the rest of the world. Sami Fattah returned to his post as the CO of the RIrAF from the Chicago Conference on Civil Aviation, having also visited some aircraft manufacturing facilities in the United Kingdom. In the opinion of the British Foreign Office, Sami Fattah was impressed by what he saw in Britain and remained "pro-British". The organisational structure of the Iraqi Air Force had been improved, though not fundamentally changed, with its Headquarters still being in the Ministry of Defence in Baghdad. Many support elements, including most of the administrative units, were still at Mu'askar al-Rashid on the south-eastern outskirts of the capital. However, it was now proposed that No. 1 (General-Purpose) Squadron should be based at Mosul and al-Diwaniyah, neither of which aerodromes were yet under full Iraqi authority, while No. 2 (Fighter) Squadron should remain at Kirkuk.

It was also proposed that the ranking structures at squadron level be regularised, with those in command being of *Muqaddam* rank, Adjutants being of *Mulazim* rank, Flight Commanders being of *Ra'is Awwal* rank with their second in commands being of *Ra'is* rank, and pilots being of either *Mulazim Thani* or *Mulazin Awwal* rank.

The Advisory Mission's Half Yearly Report at the end of May 1945 provided considerable information about officers in charge of various Technical Sections. Thus, the Officer Commanding these Sections as a whole was *Muqaddam* Sabah al-Sa'id who had a Cambridge University engineering degree and had been through the exacting RAF Engineering Course at Henlow. However, the report was less complimentary about his other qualities; "He does not, however, put his mind to his job and is of little value to the RIAF". The authors of the report were more impressed by the RIrAF's only other engineering officer, *Ra'is* Jasim Muhammad, of whom it said; "This officer has done the RAF Engineering Course at Henlow, is an excellent pilot and is, in every way, a most useful officer". The report's judgement of other senior technical officers was similarly varied. Of *Ra'is Awwal* Ra'uf Hassan who commanded the Armament Section it wrote; "This officer carried out on Armament Course at Eastchurch in 1936. He is keen and capable and has kept himself up to date as circumstances have permitted". The overall judgement of his Section was that it was "generally fair". Of the commander of the Signals Section, *Ra'is* Radi (or Hadi) Awad, it stated; "This officer is seconded from the Army and, whilst there is no reason to doubt his technical ability, it is considered that he has not the necessary qualifications for an Air Force Signals Officer".



Another Iraqi Gloster Gladiator, photographed in RIrAF markings in the UK before delivery and before a serial number was applied. It looks shiny and new, but closer inspection shows that several parts of this renovated machine were replacements. (Albert Grandolini collection)

Generally speaking, the men of the RIrAF, both officers and other ranks, worked with enthusiasm and the British concluded that the basic human material for making a small but efficient air force was already present in the RIrAF. As the Mission Report No. 45 of 31 May 1945 patronisingly put it; "they can operate efficiently if called upon to do so and if they put their minds to it". It was more critical of the pilots and of certain aspects of the RIrAF's officer corps as a whole, declaring that;

> There is good material amongst the younger officers and, on the whole, they are keen and fly well both individually and in formation …. They do not, however, appear to realise their duty in other respects. They take little interest in their men, are only too apt to punish and too loath to praise where praise is due …. There is a strong feeling amongst the officers that everything one does has an ulterior motive behind it, which has a disastrous effect on any form of initiative.

There was also criticism of the other ranks, especially the technical tradesmen who had low pay, poor training, and suffered from a lack of promotion prospects as well as a lack of supervision. Nevertheless, the Advisory Mission believed that they could be improved as the "basic material was OK". The Advisory Mission further proposed that something akin to the RAF Regiment be established for the Iraqi Air Force, to defend its airfields.

When it came to training, there were still significant difficulties even in this final year of the Second World War. At a squadron level, there was virtually no control from the ground and it was felt necessary to give a number of RIrAF officers practical experience of working in a control tower at the main RAF air base at Habbaniya. While a big effort was put into providing pilots with greater flying time, which had previously been unacceptably low, the insufficient numbers and inadequate training of ground crews hindered these efforts. Occasionally other factors added further difficulties, as when some of the ground personnel of Nos. 1 and 7 Squadrons were needed for guard duties during recent training exercises; there not being enough Army troops available to protect the airfields and aircraft.

The need to convert existing pilots to the recently acquired Avro Ansons took up a great deal of the RIrAF's time during 1945. Those involved included several senior men including the highly experienced *Muqaddam* Hafzi Aziz, the CO of No. 7 Squadron. The fact that he only flew four hours to convert to the Anson presumably reflected the fact that he already had considerable experience flying twin-engine machines. *Muqaddam* Majdi al-Din Naqib, another experienced twin-engine pilot, needed only two hours, as did some other men of similar rank. Those with the rank of *Ra'is* were mostly given from two to nearly 12 hours, depending upon their previous experience, though *Ra'is* Mahmud Ayyub and *Ra'is* Jasim Muhammad flew just under 43 and 149 hours respectively because they were training as instructors.

Most of the junior pilots, with the rank of *Mulazim* or Lieutenant, converted with from less than four hours to 24 and a half hours, perhaps again reflecting their previous experience – or lack of experience – on multi-engine aeroplanes. The Ansons were clearly worked hard, flying no fewer than 1,650 hours from September to February 1945, compared to only 818 hours during the previous six months.

Navigational skills were, in the opinion of the Advisory Mission, non-existent in the RIrAF. This was clearly an exaggeration, but the lack of such training was a serious problem. That was why the senior Navigation Officer, *Ra'is* Emmanuel Eshu (Ashoo), had been sent on a short course at RAF Manston in Kent. As the report of 31 May 1945 explained; "The equipment is very limited and is in a very poor condition mainly because most of it was under the flood of 1942 and no more has been demanded …. The pilots rely solely upon map-reading to find their way from A to B, and since they all know the country, so they appear to lose themselves but seldom". Now, however, the RIrAF possessed aeroplanes with relatively modern navigational aids, so the Advisory Mission suggested that; "their horizons [the Iraqi aircrews'] should extend beyond the Tigris and Euphrates and consideration should be given to training flights to other countries".

It may have been during his visit to the UK to look at British aircraft manufacturing facilities that the CO of the RIrAF, Sami al-Fattah, was present at the passing out parade of some new Iraqi pilots who had been learning to fly in England. Back in Iraq the RIrAF had also acquired a Link Trainer (an enclosed but moveable cockpit for blind-flying instruction). For the first time in several years, the Advisory Mission Report of May 1945 referred to air gunners; these being needed for the Avro Ansons. However, circumstances in the skies over Iraq meant that it was not considered necessary to man the turret at all times, so a separate category of aircrew was not required. Instead, the report suggested that volunteers be sought amongst existing ground crew to be trained as air gunners, or that some existing aircrew be trained for this task. As the author of the report wrote; "I consider that the introduction of an air gunner badge and wireless operator (air) badge would do a great deal towards increasing the keenness towards these two duties". He also suggested that pilots be trained as bomb-aimers. Unfortunately, the general standards of maintenance were thought to have declined. On the other hand, the Equipment Section under *Ra'is Awwal* Bushir (or al-Bushri); "is perhaps one of the best run of all".

As of 1 March 1945, the RIrAF had 14 serviceable Gladiators (Mk. I and Mk. II), plus three which were considered repairable, 11 Hawker Nisrs plus three repairable, 10 Tiger Moths plus two repairable, four or six Douglas 8A-4s plus one repairable, four Anson Mk. Is plus one repairable including one Anson on loan from the RAF, and one serviceable Vincent Mk. I.

Currently the most important machines were the Ansons. Eight had passed through Habbaniya where they were serviced by the RAF's No. 134 MU and were given new Royal Iraqi Air Force markings. Because they were so urgently needed, the first four were then accepted by the RIrAF despite not being fully operational. Two more flew to Iraq from the United Kingdom in March 1945. However, cracks appeared in the main-planes of those flown from England, leading to further doubts about the condition of all the machines. The full range of the serial numbers of the Iraqi Ansons ran from 181 to 230. Meanwhile the RIrAF's four original Ansons were retained so that training could continue.

All the pilots of the previously disbanded but now reformed No. 1 Squadron had flown solo on Ansons by the end of May 1945. So had those of the previously Douglas 8A-4-equipped No. 7 Squadron which retained three Douglases on strength for a while. Both of these units were now designated as General-Purpose Squadrons but the personnel were nevertheless disappointed because their Ansons were second-hand rather than new. Indeed, the aircraft were reportedly looking decidedly shabby, resulting in an argument between the British and Iraqi authorities which went on for several months. In the end Iraq took 26 (33 according to another source) Ansons "as new" despite the fact that 21 of them clearly had second-hand tyres, though the RIrAF was still far from happy. Meanwhile the British believed that the Americans probably supported the Iraqis in their complaints about the Ansons, suggesting that Baghdad paid £230,000 for aviation "junk" and that the RIrAF should return these machines. Furthermore, it was apparently suggested that Iraq demand modern all-metal aircraft which, coincidentally, America was ready and keen to provide.

At the time of the Advisory Mission's next half yearly report on 31 May 1945, Mosul and al-Diwaniyah aerodromes had still not been handed over to Iraqi control. Meanwhile urgent work was needed on the runways and taxi-tracks at both al-Diwaniyah and Mu'askar al-Rashid outside Baghdad, though these problems had not significantly limited the hours flown by the RIrAF, including by members of the HQ. The CO of the RIrAF, *Aqid* Sami Fattah, did not himself fly between September 1944 and February 1945, but *Aqid* Bahjat Ra'uf, the Senior Staff Officer, flew four hours while *Rais* Jihad Abd al-Ghani, the Chief Intelligence Officer, flew three hours and 10 minutes during this same period. *Muqaddam* Musa Ali, the Station Commander at Mu'askar al-Rashid, flew 10 hours while *Ra'is* Jalal Ja'afar, the Adjutant, clocked up almost 14 and a half.

The same went for senior workshop and technical officers, *Muqaddam* Sabah al-Sa'id, the Senior Engineer Officer, flew 84. *Ra'is* Jasim Muhammad, the deputy Engineer Officer, flew over 171, *Ra'is* Abd al-Hak, the Workshop Adjutant, over 31, *Ra'is Awal* Ra'uf Hassan, the Armament Officer, three and a half, *Ra'is Awal* Ahmad Aziz, the Photographic Officer, over 12. Only those medically unfit failed to register any flying hours, including *Ra'is* Emmanuel Ashoo (Eshu), the Navigation Officer.

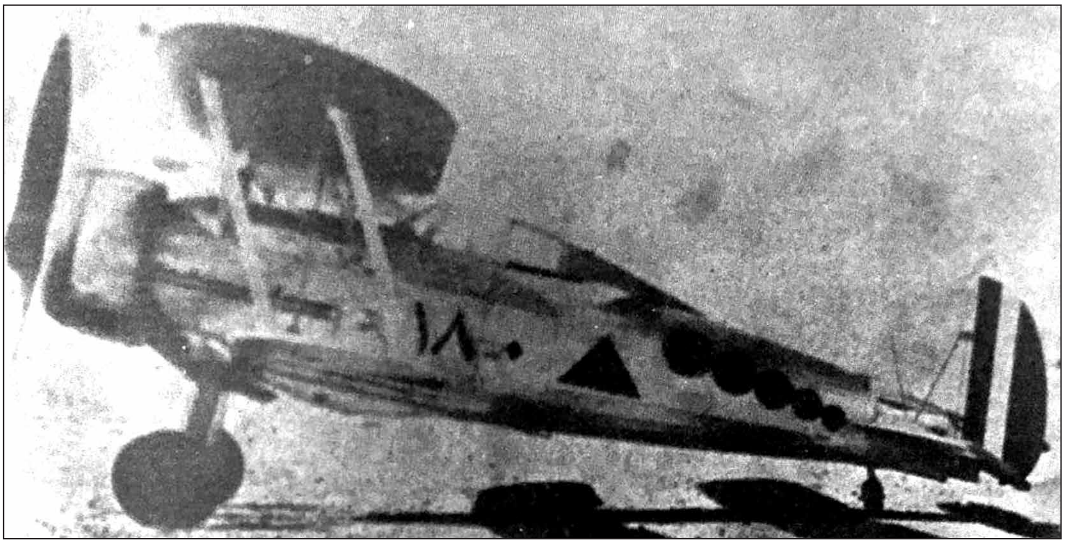
Most of these hours were probably flown on the Tiger Moths of the RIrAF FTS where *Muqaddam* Munir Abbas was the current CO, with *Mulazim* Faraj Jilanu (Kilani) as Adjutant, supported by *Ra'is Awal* Abd al-Kadhim Abadi, *Ra'is* Ghayath al-Ramadani, *Ra'is* Abd al-Khaliq Sa'adur (Abd al-Khaliq al-Sa'adun) and *Mulazim* Khalaf Mahmud Janabi, who were probably now instructors.

Not until 19 November 1945 would No. 1 Squadron return to its original hangers at Mosul aerodrome, but between September 1944 and February 1945 this squadron seems to have acquired new personnel as well as replacing its Hawker Nisrs with slightly more up to date Avro Ansons. These the ground crews of No. 1 Squadron equipped with bomb-racks as soon as they could. The unit was still commanded by Majdi al-Din Abd al-Rahman al-Naqib who currently held the rank of *Muqaddam*. He was supported by *Ra'is* Yusuf Aziz as his Adjutant. No. 1 Flight was led by *Ra'is* Salim al-Gaylani with pilots *Ra'is* Taha Abd al-Jalil, *Ra'is* Hadi Kamuna, *Mulazim* Abdullah Naji and *Mulazim* Nasir Zara. No. 2 Flight was led by *Ra'is* Mahmud Ayyub with pilots *Ra'is* Akram Rahmat Allah (currently medically unfit), *Mulazim* Hamid Shakir, *Mulazim* Abd al-Sattar Abdullah and *Mulazim* Khalil al-Mufti. *Mulazim Awal* Abd al-Razzaq and others would also join No. 1 Squadron later in 1945.

No. 2 Squadron was currently disbanded, as was No. 3 Squadron, but No. 4 (Fighter) Squadron with Gladiators was commanded by *Ra'is Awwal* Nadim Siddiq al-Aidy supported by *Ra'is* Fayiq Sa'adi as Adjutant. The other officers of No. 4 Squadron were *Ra'is* Nafi (Nafi) Abdullah, *Ra'is* Shams al-Din Abdullah, *Ra'is* Muhammad Sabi, *Ra'is* Fakri Abd al-Qadir, *Mulazim* Nuri Ahmad, *Mulazim* Ghiyath al-Din Salih, *Mulazim* Da'ud Salim, *Mulazim* Sadiq Ja'afar al-Azzur, *Mulazim* Sa'id Sulayman and *Mulazim* Salih Tikriti.

In May 1945 the British Advisory Mission was still urging that, because the Breda Ba 65s of No. 5 Squadron did so little flying, the squadron should be disbanded. In fact, the unit kept going by using three Gladiators loaned by the RIrAF's No. 4 Squadron. In the meantime, No. 5 was commanded by *Muqaddam* Hafzi Aziz with *Ra'is* Usama Duisha (Dawisha) as Adjutant. The other officers of the squadron were *Ra'is Awal* Midhat Abd al-Rahman, *Ra'is Awal* Jihad Shakir, *Ra'is* Rishad Yawir who had been seconded from the Iraqi Civil Aviation Authority, *Mulazim* Jamil Julius, *Mulazim* Fathi Tawfiq and *Mulazim* Mahmud Shakir.

No. 6 Squadron currently did not exist, and even No. 7 Squadron only had three or four Douglas 8A-4 aeroplanes left, but during 1945 these were gradually replaced by Ansons. In the meantime, *Ra'is Awal* Hilmi Abd al-Wahab was the nominal CO, though under the



A rare photograph of an RIrAF Gladiator seen sometime around 1945. The aircraft wears the serial number 180 and a set of five dark green, blue, or black dots on the rear fuselage: these designated the Flights of No. 4 Squadron. (Tom Cooper collection)

close supervision of Hafzi Aziz of No. 5 Squadron, and there was no designated Adjutant, perhaps because Hilmi Abd al-Wahab was in effect doing this job. The other officers of No. 7 Squadron at this time were *Ra'is* Hamid (Abd al-Hamid) Ridha, *Ra'is* Khalil Shafik, *Ra'is* Ahmed Majid Attak, *Ra'is* Abd al-Rahman Amin, *Ra'is* Fayiq Isma'il Haqqi, *Mulazim* Jiwas Hammudhi, *Mulazim* Wadid Faraj and *Mulazim* Hamid Tawfiq.

The fact that the British Advisory Mission Reports made no mention of discipline within the RIrAF during this period presumably means that there were no problems. This might be associated with the fact that the Iraqi Air Force found itself busier than it had been for several years. For example, a training exercise on 18th and 19 February was described as a "telephone battle" at the Iraqi Staff College. It also involved aircraft of the RIrAF carrying out dive-bombing and low-level attacks which were described as well executed while explosives detonated on the ground gave greater reality to the scene by representing bombs. Between 25th and 27 February a number of selected RIrAF officers acted as Air Defence Commanders during a TEWT (Tactical Exercise Without Troops) in northern Iraq.

On 5th and 6 March 1945, the RIrAF demonstrated its low-level attack, dive-bombing and reconnaissance capabilities to students of the Iraqi Staff College. Then on the 27th, a more ambitious exercise started and continued until 1 April. This was Exercise "Inshallah" (God Willing) whose original plan envisaged the Iraqi Army's 1st Division getting support from two Iraqi bomber squadrons and one fighter-bomber squadron. In the event, Nos. 1 and 7 Squadrons were still in the process of transitioning to Avro Ansons, so it was decided that only No. 4 Squadron would take part. Twelve of that unit's Gladiators were therefore sent to a landing ground near the ruins of the ancient city of Ur where they had been preceded by a ground party of four officers and 84 other ranks.

Exercise Inshallah was described by Wing Commander Bradley of the British Advisory Mission in Report No. 46, dated 14 November 1945. Though critical of some aspects, Bradley was generally positive, explaining that one Anson and one Tiger Moth were sent to Ur, one Douglas and one Tiger Moth to Basra for communications purposes. The RIrAF's role was as follows;

> Throughout the exercise, the RIrAF were called upon to give direct support to the various [Army] columns and to carry out reconnaissance of the battle area. On the final attack three aircraft carried out an 'Air Pin' over Hammar [an area of the southern Iraq marches]. During the exercise 28 recce sorties and 17 bombing sorties were carried out, making a total of 160 hours flying. Three aircraft were lost but the pilots all escaped injury. It is difficult to understand the cause of these accidents, as two were reported engine failure and the third the propeller flew off in the air. Bristol engines are recognised as some of the most reliable in service and the accidents can be attributed only to poor maintenance. In all fairness to the maintenance personnel of No. 4 Squadron, it must be pointed out that all three aircraft were up to date of the exercise, maintained by No. 5 Squadron, now disbanded. In my opinion, No. 4 Squadron carried out its duties in a most efficient manner … The Div [Divisional] Orders were clear and concise and were issued in ample time. The RIrAF were kept well informed of the disposition of both our own and enemy troops.

Just over a month later the RIrAF took part in two closely associated exercises called "Acquaintance & Friendship" which involved Iraqi, British and Indian troops. These lasted about six weeks and were regarded as a real test for the revived Iraqi Air Force. They were the culmination of an intense period of training over the previous winter which had immediately been followed by some internal reorganisation within the RIrAF. The first part of these exercises lasted from 8 April to 2 May and should have been preceded by 12 Gladiators, nine Ansons, three Douglas 8A-4s and one DH Moth assembling at Irbil by 7 April. In fact, confusion and misunderstanding of the orders resulted in only the Gladiators plus two Douglases and eight Ansons arriving at the designated aerodrome.

Once again Wing Commander Bradley described the exercise in Report No. 46.

> Throughout the exercise the RIrAF carried out recce and bombing sorties and from a point of view of the exercise, these duties were very well carried out …. A total of 462.30 hours flying were carried out. There were 3 accidents. The first was a Gladiator which force landed owing to engine failure; the second was an Anson which crashed due to error of judgement on the part of the pilot who found himself below the level of the mountains with insufficient room to turn; and the third was a Gladiator which swung taking off and turned over …. The difficulties of flying in mountainous country in condition of extreme 'bumpiness' and with the lack of a true horizon, cannot be overemphasised and I am of the opinion that all concerned are to be congratulated on the work carried out. The recce reports, so far as could be seen, were very accurate and messages were dropped in the correct place at the correct time. The bombing attacks were carried out in time but it is impossible to assess their real value without the use

> of [live] bombs and live ammunition. I am of the opinion that the effect of air support in confined spaces would be of great value to an Army Commander in actual practice.

The Anson which crashed was from No. 1 Squadron and the accident took place on 22 September at Dinartah near Duhuk, not far from the Turkish border during operations against the Kurdish uprising led by Mustafa al-Barzani. The crew were killed; namely pilot *Mulazim Awal Tayyar* Abd al-Majid Abd al-Razik al-Janabi, *Arif Birad* (Corporal) Anwar Aziz, and *Nathib Arif Islahah* (Deputy Gunner) Abd al-Kadir Shukry.

The RIrAF's participation in the Iraqi offensive against Kurdish rebels lasted from 19 August to 18 September 1945 and involved Nos. 1, 4 and 7 Squadrons. In preparation for this the Gladiators of No. 4 Squadron moved from Kirkuk to Mosul on 18 August and three of them were sent to bomb the village and area of Sidiqa (Sideka) three days later. The following day, 21 August 1945, saw 15 Ansons carry out reconnaissance of Amadiyah, Shaikh Mustafa's home town of Barzan, Firat Dagh, Baradust, Sidiqa (Sideka), Rust and Rawanduz as well as around the cities of Irbil and Mosul. Meanwhile three Gladiators again bombed Sidiqa.

These and similar sorties were carried out on an almost daily basis, with an intensity which the RIrAF had never achieved before. On 22 August a Douglas dropped food supplies to an Iraqi Police Post at Sidiqa which had been surrounded by dissident Kurdish tribesmen. This it did while an escorting Gladiator made a diversion and kept the enemy's heads down. A reconnaissance by two Ansons, looking for dissidents who had withdrawn into hills north-east of Sidiqa on the 23rd, was less successful. But the following day, 24 August, saw the RIrAF in action approximately 20kms north-east. This involved a bomber attack, the scattering of foes on the ground and the taking down of tents. It was a classic example of "air policing" in Iraq, as developed much earlier by the RAF. Unfortunately, it would also continue throughout most of the twentieth century with increasing brutality which eventually culminated in the use of chemical weapons against supposed "dissidents" on the ground.

One of the main difficulties as far as the RIrAF was concerned was correctly identifying their targets. For example, there was a report that "friendly" tribesmen were fighting against "hostile" tribesmen in the area of Aitut. Instead of carrying out a bombing raid which could easily have hit the wrong people, eight Ansons made a "demonstration" over the area on 24 August. Air operations continued on the 25th, with 15 aeroplanes attacking a variety of locations between 1100 and 1800 hours, including the village of Girbish to which Mustafa Barzani was reported to have withdrawn. Eight Ansons accompanied by six Gladiators were sent against rebels reported seen in hills near Hadilian the following day, while three Gladiators bombed a separate location. On the 27th there was no reported action, but on 28 August the RIrAF's Gladiators and Ansons were again in action, attacking highly specific targets described as "surrounding gardens" outside Sharita, and "trees close to the police post" at beleaguered Sidiqa. There was similar action from 29th to 31 August, involving Gladiators and Ansons but no Douglases.

This continued into September, with bombing and strafing raids on the 1st and 2nd, followed by a pause on the 3rd which may perhaps have reflected events far away in the Pacific when the Japanese Empire formally surrendered to the Allies on 2 September, ending the Second World War. However, operations in northern Iraq against Kurdish dissidents revived with even greater intensity on 4 September 1945, this time involving five Gladiator sorties, 12 Anson sorties and three by Douglas 8A-4s. The latter were reconnaissance, plus the pinpointing dropping a message to an Iraqi Police column near Amadiyah. Also on 4 September, as a consequence of the end of the Second World War, British military forces ceased to be officially in a state of war.

From 5th to 13 September 1945, RIrAF operations continued in support of the Iraqi Army and Police. Most were flown by Gladiators and Ansons though six Douglases dropped ammunition to Iraqi forces in Dinartah camp on the 6th. On that day two Gladiators escorted a convoy carrying rations in the Mazna area while four Ansons flew to Irbil to collect bread for the isolated garrison at Dinartah. It was perhaps the same bread that was dropped to the men at Dinartah by six Douglases on the 7th, while three Ansons dropped medical supplies. On that day one of the RIrAF's remaining Hawker Nisrs was called upon to drop "spares" over Rawanduz.

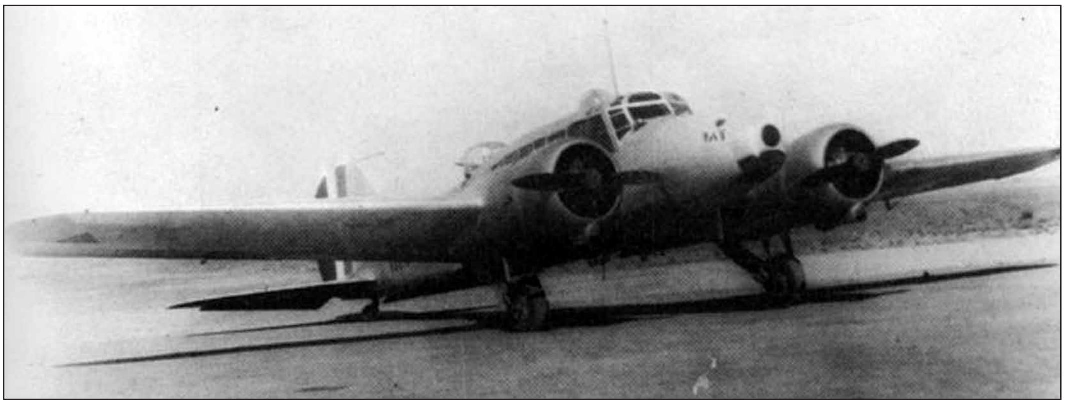
Similar sorties were flown on the 8th, including the bombing by two Ansons of a position where enemy forces had reportedly captured an Iraqi artillery piece. Ansons, Gladiators and Douglases were again in action, bombing, machine-gunning or dropping supplies on 8th and 9 September; no fewer than five Nisrs dropped rations for the troops at Dinartah on the 9th. On 10 September six Nisrs did the same. Otherwise, the sorties by Gladiators and Ansons were much as on previous days, except that one of the Ansons was sent to drop propaganda leaflets on the village of Barzan. The Kurdish rebels were now retreating and so, on 11 September, two Gladiators were sent to look for boats which the enemy might use to cross a river close to Billi (Biliyah?) near Irbil. Two others then bombed one such ferry. Meanwhile Ansons and Nisrs again dropped supplies to Dinartah.

Reconnaissance, bombing and supply dropping operations continued on the 12th and 13th, mostly by Ansons and Gladiators but also including five Nisrs on the 12th and two Douglases on the 13th. Operations on the 14th were described as mopping up. Nevertheless, those on the 15th to 17th had a similar intensity to those before and included the same types of aeroplanes, in some cases directly assisting the advance of the Iraqi Army's 4th Brigade. On the 18th, two Ansons dropped leaflets on several villages, calling on the rebels to surrender and announcing the imminent restoration of Iraqi government authority.

There were further sorties on 18th and 19 September 1945 by Ansons, Gladiators and Douglases, but that was the end of the campaign as far as the RIrAF was concerned. During the course of this operation the following RIrAF units had been drawn in. Fourteen Ansons of No. 1 and nine from No. 7 Squadrons had moved from Mu'askar al-Rashid outside Baghdad to Mosul. They were joined by a Communications Flight consisting of two Douglases, two Nisrs and three Tiger Moths. Later an additional Douglas and three Nisrs were also flown to Mosul.

Wing Commander Bradley's summary of the RIrAF's campaign against Barzani and his Kurdish followers was quite detailed, and largely complimentary. He wrote that;

> The RIrAF has been operating continuously since 18th August, 1945. Prior to 'D' [the final day of flying operations], 4 September, the RIrAF carried out bombing on selected targets within the disturbed area coupled with two formation reconnaissance flights by 15 and 10 Ansons respectively. Details of the operations up to 'D' Day …. may be summarised as follows: 25 villages attacked. Approximately 117 bombing sorties were flow. Approximately 18 1/2 tons of bombs were dropped. Since 4 September, the air force has been employed upon a variety of missions including



A total of 33 Avro Anson multi-role aircraft acquired between 1944 and 1947 became the backbone of the RIrAF of this period. (Ahmad Rushdie Sadiq al-Astrabadi Collection)

> bombing, reconnaissance, supply dropping, escorting convoys and communications. Details of the operations carried out …. may be summarised as follows: 205 bombing sorties have been flown. 96 reconnaissance sorties have been flown. 74 supply dropping sorties have been flown. Approximately 27 tons of bombs have been dropped. A total of 55 villages have been attacked [the names of these locations were all listed in an appendix to Bradley's report] …. A total of 1350 hours have been flown. Organisation: The RIrAF is under the operational control of the Army Operational Commander whose HQ is at Irbil. All requests for air supports were passed to the OC RIrAF who has an advanced HQ also at Irbil. Written orders then passed to the Station Commander at Mosul who has the following at his disposal: No. 1 Anson Squadron, No. 4 Gladiator Squadron, No. 7 Anson Squadron, Communication Flight. The officers and other ranks are billeted in an Iraqi Army barracks and the aircraft are parked in the open. One hangar is available for inspections. The bombs are stored in the RAF bomb store [at Mosul] and all equipment is received either from Baghdad or from Kirkuk. W/T links have been opened between Mosul and Baghdad, Kirkuk, Irbil.

The bomb load normally carried by an Iraqi Anson during this campaign was four 112lb bombs plus eight smaller 20lb bombs, while each RIrAF Gladiator could carry eight 20lb bombs. All bombing was during daylight. In conclusion, Wing Commander Bradley summed up what he thought would be the role, capabilities and prospects of the RIrAF now that the Second World War had ended:

> There is, it is considered, every reason to believe that the RIrAF will become an efficient service in the near future. The arrival of new aircraft has put fresh heart into the pilots who had become lethargic as a result of being allowed to fly but two days per week. This measure had become necessary in order to conserve the limited number of obsolete aircraft. The maintenance personnel are reasonably reliable and if some solution is arrived at, regarding the guard duties …, there is every reason to believe that the aircraft will be kept serviceable …. There is still much to be done but, given in the future the backing which has been received during the past six months, then the future can be viewed with optimism.

Bradley did not, of course, foresee that the ongoing crisis in Palestine would draw in the Royal Iraqi Air Force, though only as a minor player compared with the role played by the Royal Egyptian Air Force.

In his optimistic summary, Wing Commander Bradley again drew attention to the question of how RIrAF equipment and aerodromes should be protected, especially when located in those parts of Iraq which remained less than law-abiding. Central to the problem was the future of the RAF's Assyrian Levies. This question had been hanging over the heads of the British in Iraq for several years, and now it became an issue for the Iraqi authorities as well. Sometimes called the RAF Levies, the Assyrian Levies were almost an RAF Foreign Legion. During the Second World War, the Levies had grown from around 1,250 personnel to 1,900 officers and men by the middle of July 1944. The latter figure and its disposition were considered inadequate to defend the RAF's existing bases in Iraq, so it was suggested that 700 of the existing force be allocated to static defence while the remaining 1,200 be increased. There was no doubt that the RAF Assyrian Levies were now a significant force and, although the senior ranks were filled by British officers, there were now Assyrian Iraqi Christian officers in the middle ranks, including a man named Rab Khaila who appears to have been the most senior.

Assyrian Iraqi Christians were not the only men to have been recruited into these RAF Levies, which currently included Turks or Turcomans as well as others. In a letter dated 18 July 1944, a British Foreign Office official, using the terminology which was normal at the time but which today sounds almost offensive, stated that;

> I suggest that the racial composition of the force discussed above should as far as possible be kept the same as it was in the Levies before 1939. This would mean that Kurds and Assyrians would be recruited for the units stationed at Habbaniya while Arabs from Amara would be employed in the Basra area …. The number of men which will be available from each of these three racial elements will, however, depend on factors including …, in the case of the Assyrians and Kurds, their political position in the country which it is not possible to consider in detail at this stage …

The writer correctly foresaw significant problems when it came to re-assimilating demobilised Assyrian Levies into wider Iraqi society because of the role they had played under the British flag. It was clear that the long-established loyalty of the Assyrian Christian community to the British caused major problems in its relations with the majority Muslim Arab and to a lesser extent with Muslim Kurdish communities. As a British Foreign Office document of October 1944 put it, the British employment of Assyrians was "alone sufficient to estrange them from the Arab inhabitants of this country".

Clearly Britain should have put greater effort into finding a solution at an earlier date, but the British government had failed to draw up realistic plans. Instead, the British merely stated that the Assyrian Christians would have to accept being "one of the several racial and religious minorities of the country" because, in the British view, their resettlement outside Iraq was impractical and in any case no area for such a resettlement had been found. British government officials merely came to the conclusion that there would be "grave disappointed" amongst Assyrians, which was putting it mildly.

In the meantime, on the assumption that there would be no further major military operations in Iraq, the British military authorities continued to suggest the sort of numbers to which the Levies could be reduced. There were suggestions they be made available for operations outside Iraq, or to otherwise take over some second-line RAF duties in the Middle East, and there was a suggestion that an elite part of the Levies be trained as paratroopers. None of these proposals proved feasible. The ultimate fate of the RAF Assyrian Levies, and the community from which they were largely drawn, would prove to be a particularly inglorious episode in the British Empire's not particularly glorious involvement in the Arab world.

2

THE REVIVAL OF THE ROYAL EGYPTIAN AIR FORCE

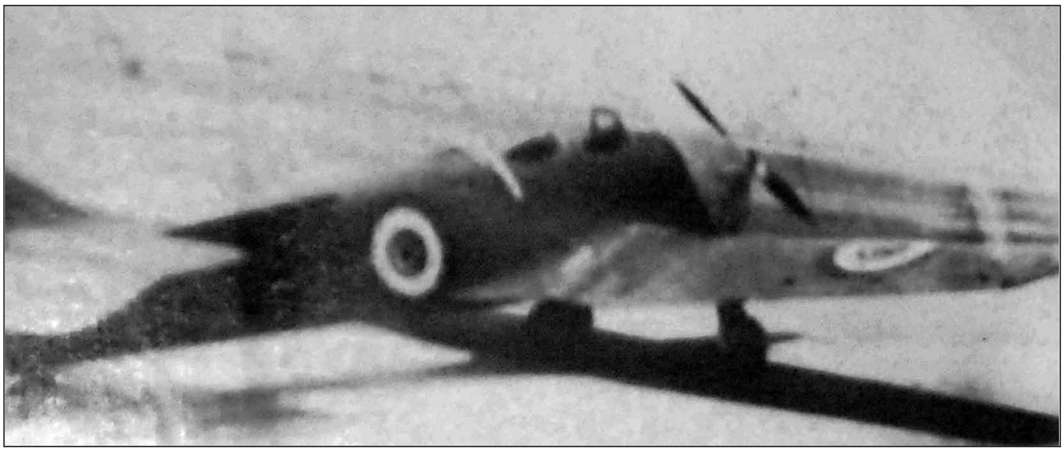
According to a later Advisory Mission Report dated 19 February 1947, the British aeroplanes supplied to the Royal Egyptian Air Force (REAF) before February 1943 and still on strength early in 1947, consisted of only five Hawker Hurricane Mk. I, two Avro Ansons, 16 Avro 626s, one Avro Commodore (Avro 641), one De Havilland Moth, 29 Gloster Gladiators, 10 Hawker "Egyptian" Audaxes, 20 assorted Hawker Harts, 34 Miles Magisters, only one Percival Q6, and 14 Westland Lysanders. All had been sold outright unless otherwise stated.

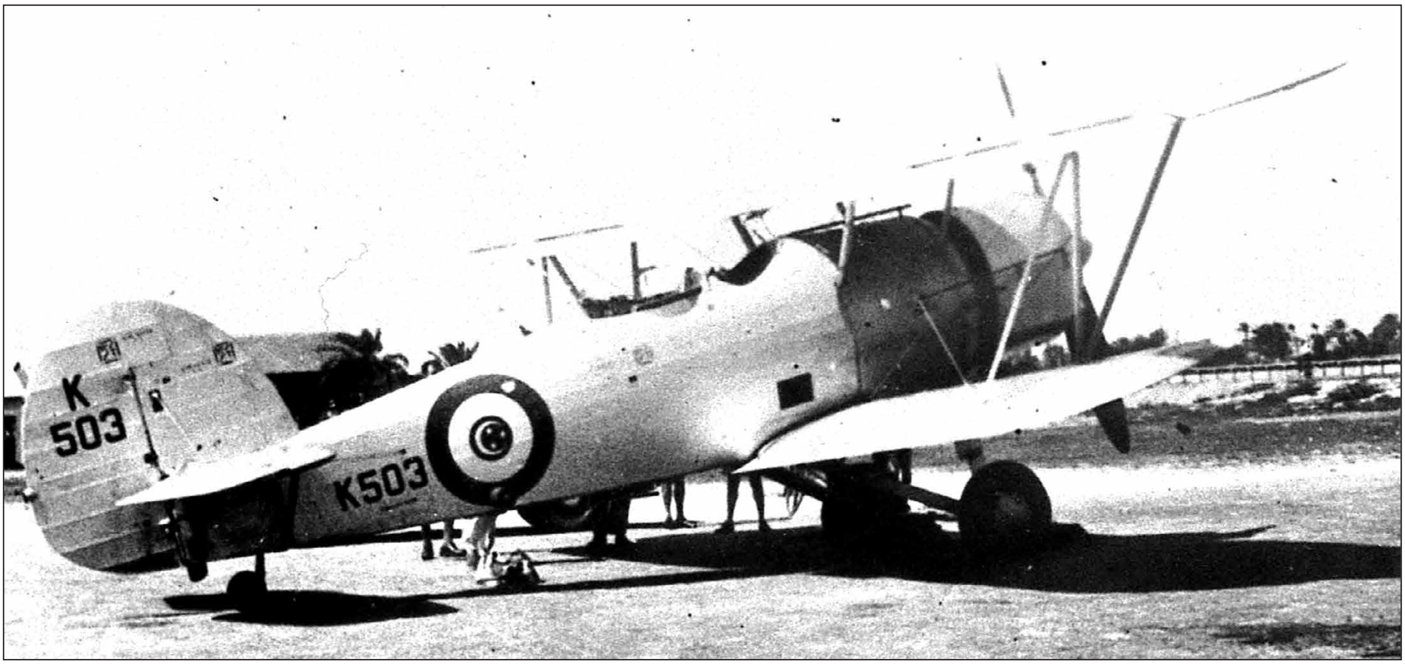
One of the renovated and repaired Curtiss P-40 Tomahawks which were handed over to the Egyptians was this machine (number AN311, individual code TA-C). Previously part of No. 2 Squadron SAAF, it had survived a collision with an Italian Macchi C.200 on 21 November 1942 when flown by Lieutenant Eric Saville (left), seen here in discussion with American war correspondent Quentin Reynolds (right). (Christopher Shores collection)

Almaza was still home to the REAF's Armaments and Wireless technical training schools but the serviceable Magisters, Avro 626s and one surviving Moth of the Flying Training School were now based at nearby Khanka. This significantly reduced the pressure on overcrowded Almaza. These aeroplanes were nevertheless currently being used for refresher courses rather than training new pilots. A brief survey of REAF units in the December 1942 report showed that No. 1 (AC) Squadron was still involved in training with gun-cameras and formation flying, despite its Lysanders suffering significant fabric deterioration because they had been standing so long in Egypt's ferocious sun. No. 2 (Fighter) Squadron's Gladiators had also been standing in the open for two years, and all needed new fabric while the "eager but frustrated" pilots were currently flying refresher courses on Magisters. In contrast, No. 5 (Fighter) Squadron was in a better condition than any other squadron, its Gladiators being slightly newer than those of No. 2 Squadron, while its pilots were keen. Its Commanding Officer, *Qa'id Sirb* Hafiz, was highly regarded by the British.

No. 6 (Fighter) Squadron was now equipped with Hawker Hurricanes (Mk. I Tropical) which, though old, were the most potent weapons in the REAF's arsenal. Its aeroplanes (originally seven) had been defending Alexandria, but by December 1942 only five were still airworthy, one being unserviceable perhaps damaged, while another had been either destroyed or badly damaged in an accident. For reasons which remain unclear, but which might be associated with the squadron's transfer from Alexandria to Cairo, No. 6 Squadron had been renumbered as No. 17 Squadron. Its remaining Mark I Hurricanes were then used for the night defence of Cairo from late 1942 until January 1943, by which time these aeroplanes were no longer considered fully serviceable; "flogged too hard" in the opinion of the British Advisory Mission. They were intended to be supplemented and theoretically replaced by Curtiss P-40 Tomahawks in April 1943, but that proved to be another big disappointment for the REAF. According to the British, No. 6/17 Squadron also needed a new CO and although its pilots remained amongst the most experienced in the REAF, their morale was described as low. In fact, *Q'ad Sirb* Salih Mahmud Salih would replace Salah Farid during 1943.

No. 3 (Communications) Squadron was described as a motley collection of aircraft limited to local flying, the Ansons and Avro 652s suffering from a shortage of spare plywood. The Royal Flight was not mentioned at all; nor was the Target Towing Flight, whose Gordons had all been declared unserviceable. Meanwhile No. 4 (Bomber) Squadron consisted of some "Egyptian" Audaxes and Harts that were similarly limited to local test flying because of fabric deterioration and low serviceability. Egyptian civil aviation was back under REAF control and was used for communications purposes while Misr Airwork, or Misrair as it was now called, was also


This appallingly bad quality photograph might show one of the REAF's Miles Magister primary trainer painted in a camouflage scheme rather than the normal overall trainer yellow. (EAF Museum collection)



One of the REAF's newer Panther X-engined Hawker Egyptian Audaxes (number K503) supposedly photographed later in the Second World War. Ten of this type were still on strength in February 1943, theoretically forming the "Advanced Squadron" of the FTS at Almaza but so out of date that they were practically useless. (EAF Museum collection)

involved in overhauling RAF equipment and doing repairs.

King Faruq (fourth from right) and various members of the Royal Flight in front of one of the REAF's Percival Q6s. This unit included some men of whom the British were still suspicious, such as Husayn Zulfiqar Sabri (sixth from right). (Sabri family archive)

It was either in December 1942 or more likely in early 1943, after the REAF had been allowed to fly normally, that Abd al-Mu'min Abd al-Ra'uf came up with a plan to free both General Aziz al-Masri and *Mulazim* Anwar Sadat. Abd al-Ra'uf had himself been transferred to the Army following the failed attempt to fly al-Masri to what was then Vichy-French ruled Lebanon. He was also considered by some to be the bravest of all the assorted conspirators, though by others as *majnun* – a mad-man. Abd al-Ra'uf's plan consisted of an attack upon the military camp where Aziz al-Masri was currently detained, releasing him then driving about 250 kilometres to al-Minya where another simultaneous assault was to have freed Sadat. A REAF aeroplane was to have landed at a small airstrip outside al-Minya where it would collect the freed prisoners before flying them to Istanbul. Even if one of the REAF's Avro Ansons or Percival Q6s – the only aircraft with sufficient range – could fill up with enough fuel for the trip, Abd al-Ra'uf's colleagues persuaded him that such an operation was far beyond their capabilities. Hence it was never attempted. It nevertheless strongly suggests that Abd al-Ra'uf was still in close touch with his former comrades in No. 3 Squadron and the Royal Flight.

The final 10 years of King Faruq's reign, from 1943 to 1952, were characterised by astonishing changes in Egypt. Industry began to be more than a minor part of the country's economy and there was a huge increase in the population accompanied by a significant expansion of the modernising, urban middle class. Indeed, this burgeoning middle class soon threatened the old order which had been based almost entirely upon land ownership by the upper and upper-middle classes. Such a process had, of course, started in the nineteenth century, accelerated during the First World War, and had then been boosted by the Second World War when British bases in Egypt recruited around a quarter of a million skilled and unskilled workers.

During the later years of the Second World War the political landscape in Egypt changed. For example, the communist party was almost entirely confined to industrial workers where it had a limited following. There were also a small number of communist party supporters in the Egyptian Army. Not until the last years of King Faruq's reign, 1950 to 1952, did the Communist Party of Egypt become a significant factor, rising from an estimated 500 to around 5,000 members.

Meanwhile, there can be little doubt that the Wafd government was becoming increasingly corrupt. Furthermore, the King had never forgiven Nahas Pasha for agreeing to be Prime Minister as a consequence of Faruq's own humiliation at the hands of the British Ambassador. The Wafd government's inability to deal effectively with a devastating outbreak of malaria in Upper Egypt gave King Faruq the excuse he needed, and in October 1944 Prime Minister Nahas Pasha was dismissed.

The new Prime Minister was Ahmad Mahir Pasha of the Sa'adist Party which had split from the Wafd in 1938. While nationalist feeling grew stronger by the year, Ahmad Mahir's new government officially joined the Allies and declared war on the Axis powers on 24 February 1945. This time the British approved such a move, though it was clearly done so that Egypt could take part in the post-war peace conferences as a member of the victorious powers. Nevertheless, this made Egypt a co-belligerent ally of the British Empire, and the same day Ahmad Mahir was shot dead by a young ultra-nationalist lawyer named Mahmud al-Issawi, as he walked across the hall of the Egyptian Parliament building.

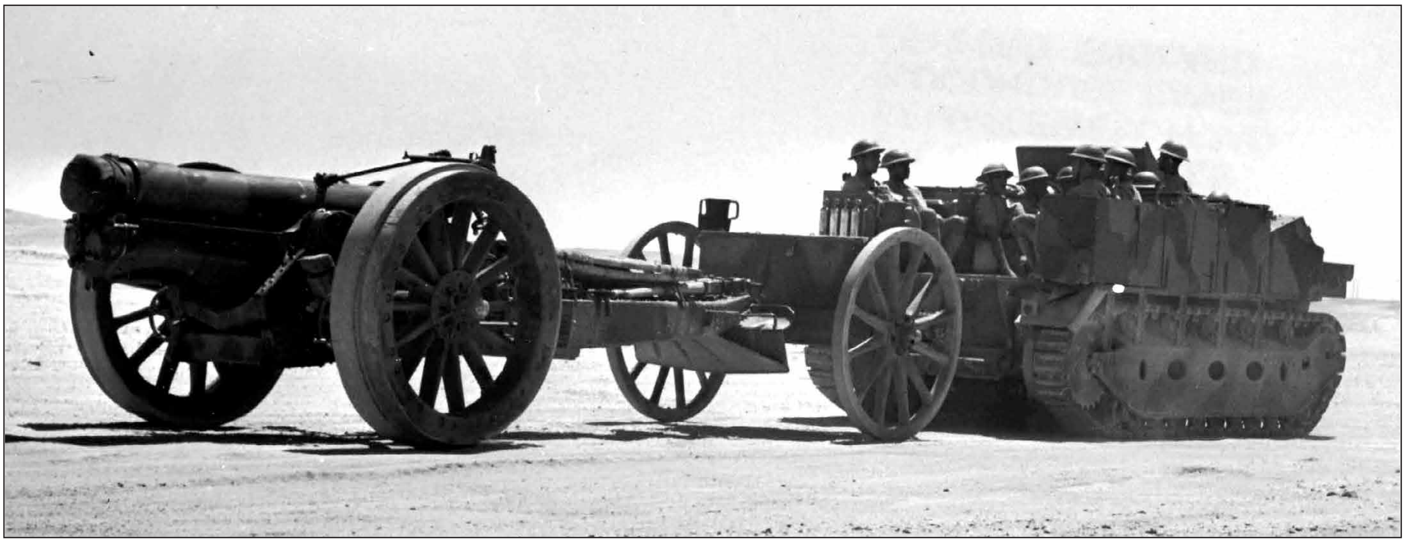
Some in the Egyptian officer corps recalled their country's declaration of war rather differently. For example, one of the most senior officers in the REAF at the time, Abd al-Mun'im al-Miqaati wrote in a letter to the author in 1974; "As you might know Egypt did not declare war against Germany except towards the later days of the war when Egypt got fed up with the continuous bombing of the Egyptian ports where the British Navy was stationed. Also some cities in the interior, Cairo, Ma'adi and Hilwan were continuously bombed".

The last three years of the Second World War saw the Egyptian Army pull itself back from a situation of subversion and near disgrace to one in which its limited capabilities were wholly dedicated to defeating the Axis powers. On 12 November 1942 enemy forces were driven out of Egypt and the culminating Allied victory in Tunis in 1943 was followed by celebration parties in Egyptian as well as British officers' messes. The first half of that year had witnessed a notable increase in cooperation between Egyptian and British forces. The Egyptian government remained co-operative and even King Faruq seemed more helpful than usual. Yet old political problems soon resurfaced. In Port Sudan, for example, the British wanted Egyptian anti-aircraft units to be withdrawn. In contrast, the Egyptian government wanted them to stay and reinforce an Egyptian presence in the Sudan where the British were clearly working towards the creation of an independent Sudanese state, separate from Egypt.

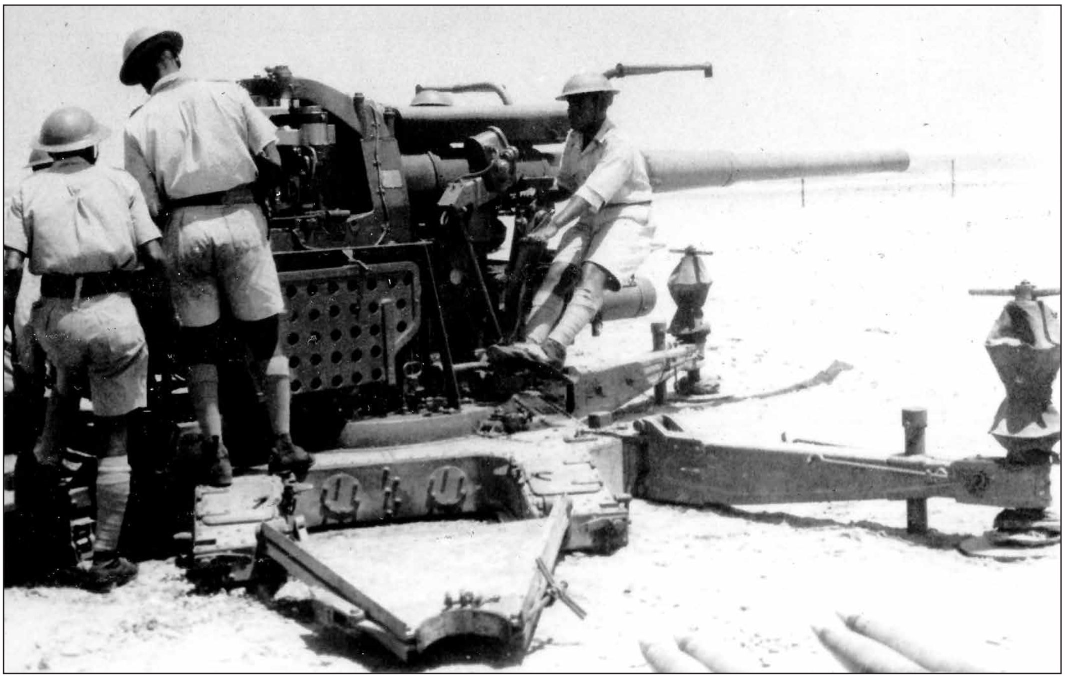
On the other hand, the British were not keen on a new Egyptian draft law on conscription in February 1943, because a larger Egyptian Army would require more equipment at a time when British industry was dedicated to supplying British military needs. There was an accompanying fear that the Egyptian military would go elsewhere – namely the USA – in search of what it wanted. Then there was the ongoing quarrel between King Faruq and the Wafd government's Minister of Defence. According to a British Advisory Mission Report on the Egyptian Army, covering the period 1 January to 20 June 1943, there had been an encouraging increase in "the spirit of cooperation" with British forces. Nevertheless, King Faruq had caused problems over the promotion of a new Commanding Officer for the elite Frontiers Brigade, which had held up all military promotions and thus caused unrest.

Another problem was that the British supported the current Egyptian government of Mustafa Nahas, whereas some Egyptian officers thought that the Army's loyalty should be solely to their King, to whom they had given their oaths of loyalty. There had also been a few cases of indiscipline, as when an Egyptian officer refused to accept orders from the British Mission, which he was strictly speaking entitled to do. Egyptian officers had made many visits to the battlefield of al-Alamain and had shown what the Mission Report described as "a great desire to learn". According to this Mission Report, there was a general feeling within the Egyptian Army they had not played a sufficiently active role in the Allied victory in Egypt, and that most officers realised that the Egyptians could not have more equipment in the present wartime circumstances. It was, after all, still only the middle of 1943.

What the British would have preferred to see were modernised but smaller and technologically more proficient Egyptian armed forces which focussed upon home defence. They did not, of course, envisage Egypt having to send an expeditionary force, supported by an air element, into a neighbouring country in just five years' time. As things stood, the Egyptian Army's tasks were very localised but nevertheless important. The Frontiers Brigade was once again carrying out anti-narcotics smuggling patrols, as well as keeping watch over the recent battlefields to stop Bedouin looting abandoned war material. This force was currently based at Kassasin, Daba'a, Kharga and Jabal Asfar with smaller units scattered throughout the Egyptian oases.



A very old piece of Egyptian Army heavy artillery being towed by a slightly more up to date tracked vehicle in 1945. (Egyptian Military Museum collection)



One of the Egyptian Army's heavy anti-aircraft guns at Port Said 1945, probably during a training exercise. (Frank Mason archive)

The Anti-Aircraft and Coastal Defence forces had significantly greater responsibilities, still having complete responsibility for the defence of Alexandria and Port Sudan. In fact, by July 1943 the British considered these to be the most effective of all Egyptian Army units. In the mid-1960s the author interviewed Major John Mason who had been a member of the British Advisory Mission during the latter part of the Second World War. Mason then worked with the Egyptian artillery and more particularly with the anti-aircraft units. Many British officers had their ranks upgraded so as to be able to work in the Military Mission and tended to be enthusiastic, skilled men who nevertheless suffered from some sort of physical defect such as flat feet which barred them from more active service. On the other hand, their young age could cause problems, demanding a high degree of diplomatic skill when advising Egyptian officers who were often older than themselves and were sensitive where the dignity of Egyptian forces was concerned.

Nevertheless, Major Mason remembered having a good time because Egypt was still technically neutral county until February 1945, and so there was "plenty of booze" which was also duty free for the men of the British Military Mission. Furthermore, they were expected to live in style to maintain the prestige and image of the Mission. However, they could not claim for minor expenses because the Egyptians expected officers to pay for these themselves. Consequently, a claim for a taxi fare tended to be inflated to five taxi fares. Major John Mason's opinion of the officers of the Egyptian Army mirrored that of Fred West, who had earlier worked with the REAF as part of the Military Mission's air section. He regarded some of his Egyptian officer colleagues as absolutely brilliant theoretically, but out of touch with what Mason called "the dirty reality". In contrast the ordinary soldiers remained very unskilled.

Meanwhile, Egyptian Army Engineers had begun the monumental task of identifying and clearing minefields – a task they were still doing at the end of the twentieth century – along with bomb disposal. Other engineer units had taken over the running of the Western Desert water pipeline from Alexandria to Marsa Matruh which was guarded by Egyptian infantry. The infantry and many support services also patrolled the Suez Canal Zone, guarded refineries and had responsibility for internal security. Meanwhile Egyptian soldiers were looking forward to manning the existing Suez Canal balloon defences, having been responsible for those around Allied airfields in the Nile Delta since April 1943.

The year 1943 saw the process of rehabilitating the REAF gather momentum. Group Captain Johhny Chick, the leader of the Air Section of the British Advisory Mission, was generally regarded as an ally, especially by the higher ranks of the REAF. Abd al-Mun'im Miqaati himself told the author that Chick was both friendly and helpful, arranging things in a manner which worked well for all sides. Yet Group Captain Chick's first report of 1943 was almost brutal in its exposure of the REAF's weaknesses. He attributed its low level of training and morale to poor leadership in the higher ranks, a lack of experience and training amongst staff officers, and the undeniably difficult political situation.

In practice the political situation was the primary cause of inadequate leadership in the REAF, though even here the politicians and civil servants were not entirely to blame. The structure and proposed development of the Egyptian Air Force had been established during Mustafa al-Nahas Pasha's third term as Prime Minister (9 May 1936 to 29 December 1937) and the second term of Muhammad Mahmud Pasha which followed (29 December 1937 to 18 August 1939). The result was a balanced force which nevertheless reflected neither Egypt's geopolitical situation nor the rapid changes in both British and Egyptian government policies. When the planned expansion was halted during Ali Mahir Pasha's second term as Prime Minister (18 August 1939 to 28 June 1940) the REAF found itself with surplus manpower because the proposed establishment of new units had been cancelled. Writing several years later, Group Captain Chick stated that in March 1943 he had found the REAF demoralised and with "nothing to so" – a slight exaggeration. So, he decided to make them work, which he did.

The problems of leadership were then compounded by the REAF having as its Commanding Officer a series of Army men who, while enthusiastic and effective as leaders, had little or no experience of aeronautical matters. Despite a good working relationship at the top of both the REAF and the British Advisory Mission there was, by 1943, friction between the middle and lower ranking personnel of both organisations. While Egyptian officers were eager to show their abilities without having to constantly defer to their British advisors, these advisors often complained of either being ignored or having their influence amongst the lower ranks inhibited. Similarly, senior REAF officers felt frustrated by more senior Army officers who knew less about air force matters than they did. Some of their juniors also suspected that positions of leadership and command were allocated on the basis of loyalty rather than ability or, worse still, on loyalty to the British. This resulted in a growing gap of trust between older officers who had often started their careers in the Egyptian Army or Egyptian Army Air Force (EAAF), and younger men who had joined the Royal Egyptian Air Force (REAF) after its creation.

Furthermore, the experiences of the first three years of the Second World War had been frustrating and sometimes demoralising. This, for the British Advisory Mission, was the most pressing problem, and the way to solve it was to raise the REAF's efficiency and give it a proper role.

Belief in an Allied victory had revived following the Second Battle of al-Alamain and when Axis forces were finally driven out of North Africa this was genuinely welcomed by the majority of Egyptian officers. Indeed, the latter often blamed their own government for not allowing them a more active role during the North African campaign. Even before this campaign was successfully concluded in Tunisia, the British had started to look more favourably upon strengthening the REAF and of using it to support the Allied war effort.

According to a report dated 30 April 1943, the Egyptian air force had declined to a state where it was only of use for communications and, to some extent, for internal security. The greatest blow to morale may have come when the Gladiators of Nos. 2 and 6 Squadrons were denied an effective role in defence of their own country. Now, however, it was decided that Nos. 2 and 6 Fighter Squadrons would be provided with relatively modern British equipment so that they could take over some duties and thus free RAF units for more active service. On 23 March 1943 a conference overseen by the CO of the RAF in the Middle East confirmed this new policy. It was therefore agreed that the REAF should take responsibility for the defence of the Nile Delta, for the balloon defences of the Suez Canal Zone and for the operation of the local Meteorological Flight. REAF radio operators would work in closer conjunction with their RAF counterparts in Egypt. Suitable REAF aircrew would also be allocated to No. 216 Transport and Ferry Group while selected REAF fighter pilots would be sent for combat training in the RAF.

Unfortunately, Egypt's volatile and unstable internal political situation continued to affect these military developments. During the first months of 1943 King Faruq took advantage of what was called the "black book" crisis to undermine the government of Mustafa Nahas Pasha. The "black book" was a scurrilous work by Nahas Pasha's former friend Makram Ibaid who claimed that the Prime Minister's young wife Zainab Hanim al-Wakil had undue influence over her husband who was over 30 years older than herself. Nahas Pasha, though an undoubted patriot, found himself in increasing need of British support – itself something of a poisoned chalice in current circumstances.

Nor did the actions of the British Ambassador in Cairo do much to calm the situation, as he had been instructed by Winston Churchill to give priority to bringing the REAF under effective British control. It was thought that the Air Force's ambitious retraining program could not reach fruition until 31 October 1944 because it not only involved operational aircrew but also senior officers. On the other hand, almost a hundred REAF middle and lower ranking personnel and a significant number of senior officers were sent to RAF Command and Staff Colleges while four others were given advanced training in operational planning and control. Also in July 1943, a conference in the headquarters of the British RAF Military Mission decided that those members of the REAF who had been transferred to the Army as a punishment in 1942 should now be returned to the Air Force – all, that is, except for one man who was still considered to be fiercely anti-British. Meanwhile morale appeared to have improved and there had been no recent serious accidents.

Where the provision of reasonably modern aeroplanes to the REAF was concerned, it was agreed that the Egyptians could at last replace their aged, outclassed and almost unserviceable Gloster Gladiators. The majority had been standing in the open for over two years. The answer seemed to be found in spare Curtiss P-40 Tomahawks which the RAF was prepared to lend to the REAF. At one point three squadrons of Tomahawks was apparently envisaged, although the Egyptian government preferred what it saw as more suitable tropicalised Hawker Hurricane IICs. Meanwhile the British maintained that the REAF could only operate one such squadron if that unit was to be fully operational and up to British RAF standards. According to a report by Wing Commander Burges of the British Air Ministry, dated 18 August 1943, the RAF suggested that the REAF should be employed on convoy protection in the eastern Mediterranean. Unfortunately, the Egyptian government was not enthusiastic about such an undramatic and tedious role for Egypt's revived Air Force. The British government similarly had reservations about using still technically neutral Egyptian forces in this role.

Even when such a role was agreed, the REAF wanted to take over an existing RAF Hurricane squadron for the work, thus releasing British personnel for use elsewhere, whereas the British suggested forming an entirely new REAF Hurricane squadron. As early as May 1942 the British appear to have selected the 25 Egyptian pilots whom they considered best suited for the REAF's new Hurricane squadron, and some of these men may have been given initial training over the following year.

As so often, it fell to Group Captain Johnny Chick, the head of the RAF Advisory Mission, to broker a compromise. At a meeting in August 1943 he convinced the Egyptian Minister of Defence to ratify what was essentially a British plan designed to suit British needs. This can be summarised as follows:

A. The continued use of Egyptian fighter squadrons, after they had been re-equipped, as part of the overall Eastern Mediterranean air defence system under RAF operational control and planning.
B. A reorganisation of the REAF Staff and Headquarters which would in turn benefit from having some its men sent on RAF Staff Courses in the Middle East.
C. A thorough review of REAF facilities, including airfields, to make them suitable for operational use by modern aircraft.
D. Proper maintenance and repair workshops would be established for the same reason.
E. New budget estimates would be drawn up in the light of these plans.
F. The Flying Training School and School for Air Force mechanics would be reopened.
G. A new and secret Air Warfare College would be created for the REAF to supply suitably qualified personnel.
H. The REAF's substantial number of highly skilled but currently civilian craftsmen would be militarised.
I. A new Air Force Act would be passed by the Egyptian government to regulate service in the REAF.

At the same time the British were assured that senior REAF officers would not hamper the work of the Military Mission, as had sometimes been the case in the past.

In October 1943 the Egyptian Ministry of Aviation agreed to reequip the REAF's Nos. 2 and 5 Squadrons, both of which had already operated successfully under British command during the earlier part of the Second World War. However, it was clearly impossible to reequip all the REAF's squadrons at once, though their need was great. For example, No. 1 (Army Cooperation)

Not until the REAF acquired a squadron of cannon-armed Hawker Hurricane IICs did Egypt have a reasonably up to date fighter force. Here Sa'id Salim, the Egyptian Minister of Defence (in white jacket) is seen visiting No. 2 Squadron, probably on 28 October 1945. Several significant individuals appear in the photograph including (left to right) Squadron Leader Muhammad Abd al-Mun'im Ahmad, Abd al-Khaliq Sabir the Under Secretary of State for Defence (in dark suit), Flight Lieutenant Hashad, His Excellency Sa'id Salim himself, *Liwa* Muhammad Mitwalli (the Director of the REAF), and Squadron Leader Gazerine. Behind them is a Hawker Hurricane (number LB927), probably with the individual code G, while beneath the cannons on the far right the code letter of this aeroplane can also just be seen. (Ibrahim Gazerine collection)

Squadron's Lysanders were not only out of date but were proving extremely difficult to maintain in flying condition. Yet it was desirable to continue the progress that their crews had already achieved. No. 4 (Bomber) Squadron had never received the Blenheims that had originally been promised, and were instead still flying a handful of machines with very light bombloads. In fact, neither the British RAF nor the Egyptian Ministry of Aviation saw this unit as a priority and instead it was suggested that some No. 4 Squadron pilots be transferred to other squadrons.

The entire strategic situation then changed with Italy's sudden and rather unexpected capitulation on 8 September 1943. Egypt, it was now hoped, would no longer be a target for enemy air attack, despite the presence of German forces in Crete and the Greek mainland. So, the idea that new REAF fighters should replace the RAF in Egypt was dropped. In the event this decision proved premature because German forces promptly took over Italian possessions in the Aegean. The British had immediately tried to get the Italian garrisons in the Dodecanese islands to change sides and in fact the Italian commander chose loyalty to King Victor Emanuel III and an alliance with the Allies. However, he and his men were overwhelmed because German forces already in Rhodes were immediately reinforced by others elsewhere in Greece (Battle of Rhodes 9th to 11 September 1943). An unsuccessful attempt by the British to oust the Germans came to an end on 22 November and thereafter the presence of German Luftwaffe units on the island of Rhodes ensured that Egypt remained in the firing line of the air war.

By the end of 1943 a modernisation plan, which had been designed primarily to serve British interests, was beginning to bear fruit and the REAF's position was undoubtedly better than it had been. No. 6 Squadron had been fully re-equipped and retrained with P-40 Tomahawks. These retained their RAF serial numbers but were of course given Egyptian national markings. The P-40 which are known to have been transferred to the REAF were all Curtiss Tomahawk Mk. IIb types; (AK396, AK434, AK448, AK455, AK470, AK546, AK561, AM404, AM405, AM485, AN219, AN265, AN311, AN328, AN352, AN448 and AN449). The one exception (AH913) was a Tomahawk Mk. IIa. This latter machine may actually have been a replacement for the first Mk. IIb lost in an accident due to mechanical failure (see below). AN311 had previously being used by No. 2 South African Air Force and while being flown by Flight Lieutenant Eric Saville, its starboard wing was damaged in a collision with an Italian Macchi MC 200.

No. 2 Squadron was similarly rearmed with Hurricane IICs. A longer-term plan was for the REAF to have nine operational squadrons including fighters, bombers, army-cooperation and communications units, plus three training squadrons. Its manpower strength was expected to be over 2,500 personnel. Of these almost 130 were officers (including pilots), and there were 30 NCO pilots. At the start of 1944 a number of senior men were still attending various courses with the RAF. Group Captain Chick described the results as astonishing – at least to British observers – with the REAF's capabilities and morale continuing to improve dramatically. In fact, the REAF was soon in a position to make a serious contribution to the defence of Egypt, though some weaknesses at the HQ and in the Staff remained unresolved, largely as a result of differing opinions between senior Egyptian Army and Air Force officers. Consequently, the inadequacy of the Air HQ at the War Ministry in Cairo persisted and was still there when Egypt next went to war in 1948.

Looking at various aspects of the REAF in greater detail, in 1943 it was still commanded by *Liwa* Husni Tahir, an Army officer who had taken over immediately after the previous year's crisis. He would remain in charge until 1944. According to Group Captain Chick's Mission Report of 25 July 1943, Husni Tahir Pasha was a strict disciplinarian who imposed a highly centralised authority and had pro-British sympathies. Also in 1943, the British showed their appreciation of the efforts of his predecessors as Director of the REAF by awarding the CBE (Commander of the British Empire) to both *Liwa* Ali Mu'afi, and *Liwa* Hassan Abd al-Wahab. Whether such a British imperial order did these two officers any political favours is another matter. In fact, King Faruq would subsequently refuse to allow any other REAF personnel to accept British decorations, even after the war had ended, so bitter did he feel about the way he had been treated back in 1942.

The year 1943 saw clear improvements in the REAF's Engineering department, and in the continuing training of its personnel, including *Qa'id Asrab* (Squadron Leader) Raziq, a one-time "Egyptian" Audax pilot who had done a two-year intensive engineering course at RAF Henlow in 1934–1936. Others included *Qa'id Sirb* (Flight Lieutenant) Gazerine an engine specialist, and *Qa'id Sirb* (Flight Lieutenant) Hassan Tawfik who now specialised in radio communications. These men had to maintain their own flying hours, of course; Hassan Tawfik not only flying Magisters as he had in previous years but, on 31 March 1943, also flying the Avro Commodore (serial number W203) which had been given a replacement engine by his colleague Gazerine. However, the REAF still remained seriously short of spare parts. The maintenance and repair personnel did what they could, for example giving the ancient Gladiators of Nos. 2 and 5 Squadrons new fabric. At the start of 1943, No. 17 (ex-No. 6) Squadron's single flight of Hurricane Mk. Is were all grounded, partly as a result of a political crisis but largely because they were now barely airworthy. Yet by the summer of that year REAF technicians had got them all flying alongside the newly arrived but soon to prove unsatisfactory Tomahawks.

For the REAF, one of the most positive aspects of 1943 was the arrival of replacement – though invariably second-hand – aeroplanes. They were clearly needed as, according to a British report dated 10 January, all the Hurricanes were unserviceable, while only four Gladiator could fly, along with seven Lysanders. In February, a more comprehensive report listed the REAF strength as 11 Lysanders, six Hurricanes, two Ansons, two Percival Q6s, 31 Magisters including the one still being used a squadron hack by No. 3 Squadron, one Commodore, one Moth, 24 Harts (this number actually including the "Egyptian" Audaxes), 16 Gladiators, 16 Tomahawks and 11 Avro 626s. It was a significant improvement over the previous month.

In fact, Britain would supply a significant number of both British and American built aeroplanes to the REAF, consisting of 26 Tomahawks, all of which were loaned and would soon be returned, four T-6 Harvards, which were again loaned rather than being sold to Egypt, and 20 Hawker Hurricane Mk. IICs. Two and a half months later at the end of April 1943, the next British Advisory Mission Report indicated that many previously unserviceable machines were now operational. They were distributed amongst the REAF's squadrons as follows:

At Almaza:

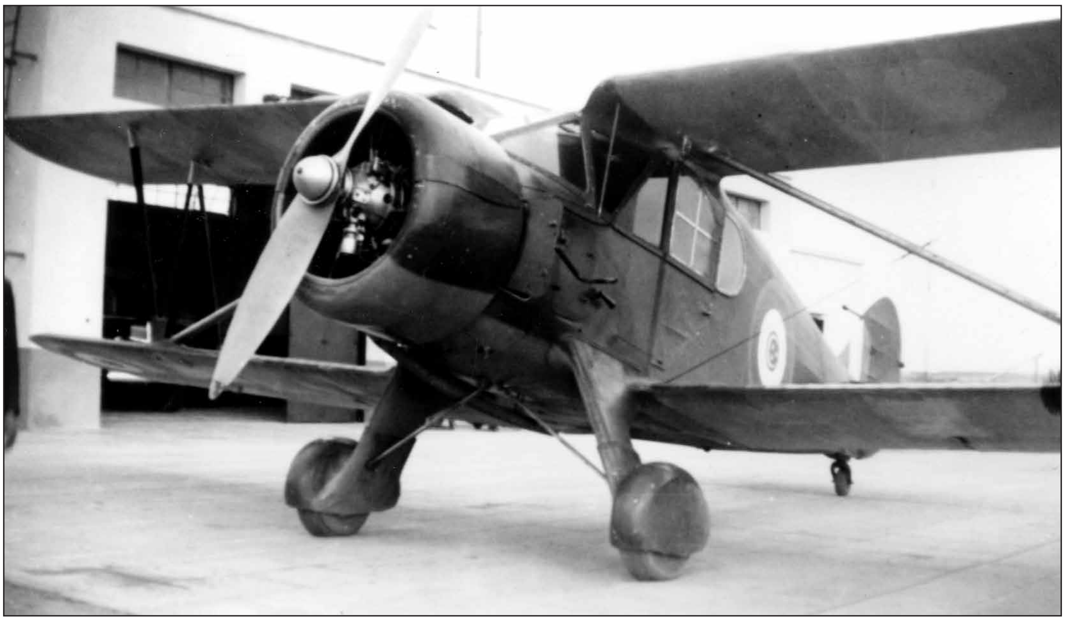
No.1 (AC) Squadron: 14 x Lysanders
No. 2 (Fighter) Squadron: 15 x Gladiators
No. 3 (Communications) Squadron: 2 x Ansons, 2 x Percival Q-6s, 1 x Avro Commodore, 1 x Hart Trainer, 1 x De Havilland Moth
No. 4 (Bomber) Squadron 14 x Hart Trainers
No. 17 [ex-No. 6] (Fighter) Squadron; 6 x Tomahawks, 5 x Hurricanes, 6 x Hart Trainers
Flying Training School 34 x Magisters, 16 x Avro 626s, 6 x Hart Trainers (perhaps with HQ at Almaza but largely operating from nearby Khanka)

At Suez:
No.5 (Fighter) Squadron: 14 x Gladiators

This total of 140 aeroplanes included the 11 obsolete aeroplanes of No.17 Squadron; its six Tomahawks would also soon be discarded while its Hurricanes were used only for training. Meanwhile, the remaining Gladiators of No. 2 Squadron were almost entirely grounded due to a lack of spares.

The story of the REAF's Curtiss P-40 Tomahawks was one of disappointment and recrimination, giving ammunition to those in Egypt who tended towards conspiracy theories. The original idea had already caused concern in British government circles where there was fear that allowing the Egyptians to acquire American military aircraft might lure the REAF away from "buying British". There was also considerable fuss over whether these ex-RAF aeroplanes had been Lend-Lease or cash and carry; in other words, whether the British were entitled to pass them on to a third party. Eventually it was decided that there was no need to inform the Americans of this matter because the Tomahawks were declared to be "not strictly Lend Lease aircraft". The British had also got themselves into difficult with a similar matter in March 1943, when 150 Lend-Lease military lorries had been passed to the Egyptian Army. Eventually the REAF got its first six Tomahawks in April 1943, by which time it had requested three more. According to the records, a total of 12 were supposedly handed over to the Egyptians by the beginning of October, though the final three may never have reached the REAF which was, by then, already very unhappy with these aeroplanes.

Meanwhile the REAF received its first Harvards. The North American Texan advanced trainer, known as the BC-1, AT-6, T-6 or, in British and Commonwealth countries, as the Harvard, saw service in a remarkable number of air forces. In the Middle East they would be operated by the British, Egyptian, Syrian, Lebanese, Yemeni and Israeli air forces. The first Arab air force to receive Harvards was, however, the REAF. In July 1943 the British RAF's No. 71 Officer Training Unit (OTU) lent two Harvards to the REAF's Flying Training School where they were desperately


An entry in Hassan Tawfiq's logbook on 31 March 1943 shows that the REAF's Avro Commodore (number W203), which had been given a replacement engine by Tawfiq's colleague Gazerine, was used by otherwise desk-bound staff officers who needed to keep up their flying hours. At some date later in the war it was also painted in an RAF-style desert camouflage scheme. (EAF Museum collection)

The REAF's Curtiss P-40 Tomahawks proved so unreliable that they could not be used for their intended role in convoy protection work. Nevertheless, some remained on strength long enough to be photographed with pilot cadets from the class which would be thrown into combat against the Israeli Air Force in 1948. (Taher Zaki collection)

needed. However, this was the middle of the Second World War and the RAF was still in need of advanced trainers, so within hardly more than weeks these aeroplanes were passed on again, this time the RAF's No. 70 OTU which, having been based at Ismailiya next to the Suez Canal, had moved to Nakuru in Kenya in 1941. It would start moving back to Shandur in the Egyptian Canal Zone in May 1941.

From then until the end of the Second World War the RAF loaned Harvards in ones or twos to the REAF whenever the British authorities felt able or inclined to do so. Two were, for example, with the REAF's Flying Training School at Almaza in October and November 1943; both nevertheless retained their RAF serial numbers (AJ838 and AJ842) but were reportedly given Egyptian national markings. Not until 1946 would the British government allow Egypt to purchase other surplus ex-RAF Harvards. Evidence from various scattered documentary sources shows that the following Harvards were transferred from the RAF to the REAF during the last year of the war: AJ838 on 1 November 1943 but written off in a flying accident on 23 December the same year; EX156 on 1 March 1944 then returned to the RAF on 31 August 1944; AJ822 on 4 April 1944 but crashed then returned to the RAF for repairs then struck off charge 31 May 1945; AJ842 also on 4 April 1944, returned to the RAF 31 August 1944 then struck off charge on 31 May 1945; EX152 4 April 1944 and struck off charge on 29 March 1945.

The REAF's British Hurricanes proved to be much more satisfactory than its American Tomahawks, especially as the Egyptians had experience of operating this type since 1942. The REAF now offered to ease the RAF's manpower shortage by undertaking extended convoy protection over the Mediterranean, but to do so the Egyptians wanted to take over an existing RAF Hurricane squadron's equipment. Such duties would also entail operating beyond Egypt's own territorial water which the British government was not yet willing to accept because Egypt officially remained a neutral country.

During September 1943 the Egyptian government formally announced it desire to establish a Hurricane squadron, to which Britain agreed. However, Egypt also requested financial assistance, so Britain offered 18 Hurricane Mk. IICs at £5,000 each to be placed under the RAF's Air Defence Middle East Command for the static defence of Egypt. The Egyptians suggested that the aeroplanes be loaned free of charge, there already being an established precedent for loaning aircraft to Egypt when the REAF took over RAF duties. Unfortunately, the British Treasury baulked at replacing any resulting losses from active service. Then came the Italian surrender which altered the entire Mediterranean situation. The idea of the REAF replacing a RAF squadron was dropped and Egypt agreed to buy 18 Hurricanes for shipping protection work while the British at last agreed to make good any losses.

According to a British Foreign Office report drawn up in February 1947, 20 Hurricanes Mk. IICs were supplied to Egypt in 1943. If this included the original 18 plus two replacements, then the date might be incorrect as two machines were actually lost on 8 June 1944. The serial numbers of the REAF's Hurricanes are rather confusing because a small number had been delivered earlier. The REAF may also have gained some Hurricanes when it took over an RAF Meteorological Flight, though some of these seem to have been transferred from other REAF units. Meanwhile, three further ex-RAF Avro Ansons were transferred to the REAF around November 1943 (serial numbers LT251, LT283 and LT285).

The acute congestion at Almaza aerodrome started to be relieved as the war moved further away from Egypt and a number of ex-RAF airfields were transferred to the Egyptians. Much of the Flying Training School's work seems to have been transferred back to Almaza from Khanka and all the REAF's current instructors had reportedly been qualified at the RAF's Central Flying School.

When Abd al-Hamid Abu Zaid returned to the REAF after his disciplinary period in the Army, he first had to undertake an intensive refresher course at the FTS. Here his first flight after 13 months of being "grounded" was on 31 August 1943. Over the next four weeks his logbook provides the names of several REAF flying instructors: *Qa'id Asrab* (Squadron Leader) Khalifah, *Qa'id Sirb* (Flight Lieutenant) Hassib, *Tayyar Awal* (Flying Officer) Kamal al-Din Hamada, *Tayyar Awal* (Flying Officer) Yaqut, *Tayyar Thani* (Pilot Officer) Ganzuri, *Dabat Saff* (Warrant Officer) Munir, *Dabat Saff* (Warrant Officer) Sadiq and *Dabat Saff* (Warrant Officer) Shams. It is interesting to note that two of these men, Khalifah and Hamada, had like Abu Zaid himself been in the British Intelligence list of anti-British but "pro-Palace" potential troublemakers back in May and June 1942. Presumably they had avoided being grounded as a result of the crisis of that year.

The REAF currently included about 130 pilots, both officers and NCOs, and the much delayed expansion programme had been delayed until 1946. In fact, the Egyptian government was already planning for a post-war situation. According to the Advisory Mission Report of July 1943 the FTS had not accepted a new cadre (or cohort, as the Egyptians called them) of flying cadets since the crisis of 1942. This report also stated that the FTS at Almaza now had 34 Magisters, 16 Avro 626s and 10 "Egyptian" Audaxes. The Magisters were considered adequate for what was expected of them, but the 626s and Audaxes were so out of date that not much could be done with them except taking part in anti-aircraft sighting exercises in the Port Said Area.

In fact, the FTS was having problems with its intermediate flying training courses and was also in urgent need of North American T-6 Harvards or Miles Masters. Two Harvards from RAF No 71 OTU in the Canal Zone had helped in conversion training when this British unit came back to Ismailiya from the Sudan. However, only four Egyptian pilots had flown solo in Harvards and Tomahawks before the loaned Harvards were passed on to the RAF's No 70 OTU. There was a possibility that such aeroplanes might be loaned by the RAF in the future, but the REAF clearly needed its own Harvards. On 23 December 1943 a Harvard (serial number AJ838) was written off in flying accident at Almaza, but it is unclear whether this was an RAF machine on loan or a Harvard now belonging to the REAF. Abu Zaid had flown this aeroplane several times during his refresher course earlier in the year.

During the early part of 1943 other REAF pilots had been sent on courses to learn to fly Hurricanes, at the RAF's Nos. 71 and 73 OTUs. The July report then described the REAF's flying standards good, with RAF courses at these OTUs being a regular feature of their ongoing training. Competition for such Fighter, Fighter-Recce, Junior Commander and Signals courses was very keen, as was competition with RAF personnel on the courses themselves. One REAF pilot qualified in second place at 74 OTU, ahead of his fellow pupils, all of whom came from fully operational RAF units. Indeed, the RAF with all too typical imperial arrogance described the results of these courses for Egyptian officers as being "surprisingly good."

Such courses were not without their dangers, however, as recalled by H.M. Jawahraji in an article published in the REAF's "in house magazine", *Mujallat al-Silah al-Jawi al-Malki* (*Journal of the Royal Air Force*) in 1950. In October 1943 he was sent to the RAF OTU at Ismailiya to learn "modern air fighting" techniques on Hurricanes. Almost all those attending the exercise, as Jawahraji called it, were qualified fighter pilots. "On this day, as usual, we went to the squadron commander's office early in the morning, before sunrise, to get our orders for the day and to see which aeroplanes were available". From previous experience Jawahraji knew that aeroplane number 3 was the "best and fastest" – each of the OTU's machines being given a large identification number painted on the fuselage. So, this was the one he wanted to fly.

The leader of the flight had been flying number 3 but now it was Jawahraji's turn. That day's training was to involve an hour and a half's very low altitude flying. Delighted that he had been allocated number 3, he took his parachute and lifejacket and headed for the machine at 06.30 in the morning. The Training Flight took off and headed east, across the Bitter Lake to the area in Sinai where training would take place. At this point Jawahraji saw smoke coming from the exhausts on the left side of his aeroplane, followed by the engine losing power. Because the pilots were all flying very low there was almost nothing he could do except attempt a wheels-up landing. This he did and suffered a severe blow to his right eye in the process. Briefly stunned, he soon came to his senses and quickly got out of the aeroplane, fearing that its cannon ammunition might explode. It was all over so quickly that Jawahraji's leader did not immediately realise what had happened. However, the flight leader turned back and was surprised to see the Egyptian standing near his machine and waving. Jawahraji described his belly-landed aeroplane as "looking like a slaughtered bull" while he himself was standing alone in the middle of a totally uninhabited desert.

Those of the REAF's remaining Avro 626s which were used by the "Intermediary Squadron" of the Egyptian Flying Training School at Almaza in 1943 are understood to have had the final digit of their serial numbers, in this case 8, repeated in large form on their fuselages, as was already seen on the FTS's Miles Magisters. (N. Franklin photograph)

All but one of the REAF officers and warrant officers who had been sent to the Army as a disciplinary measure had now returned to their previous duties in the Air Force, and all needed some degree of retraining. It is nevertheless interesting to note that, at least in some cases, their promotions had not been delayed. Abd al-Hamid Abu Zaid's logbook shows that, after 13 months grounded, his refresher course took 28 days, not all of which were flying. In fact, after two flights in an Avro 626 on 31 August, the first as a passenger with *Tayyar Awal* Yaqut (in J326) and the second solo (in J321), Abu Zaid spent the next six days on the ground, presumably doing other forms of refresher training. His next three flights were again in Avro 626s, being instructed by *Qa'id Asrab* Khalif as first pilot on 7 September (in J321), *Tayyar Awal* Hamada on the 11th (in J333) and *Dabat Saff* Sadiq on the 13th (in J329).

These were followed by two solo flights, 40 minutes after his first flight on the 13th (this time in J305). On the 14th, 15th and 16th Abu Zaid made two flights per day in an Avro 626, one with Sadiq and the other solo. On the first day his solo came first but on the other days he was with his instructor before going up solo. From the 18th to the 26th Abu Zaid made one flight per day in an Avro 626, all solo, while on the 27th he flew cross-country to Suez and back in Magister L230 with *Dabat Saff* Saqiq.

Sadiq wrote "Completed refresher course, fit for flying" in Abu Zaid's logbook, this being certified as correct on 27 September 1943 by *Tayyar Awal* Hamada as CO of No. 2. Squadron, presumably meaning that he was in charge of the Second Squadron of the FTS rather than of No. 2 (Fighter) Squadron. Abd al-Hamid Abu Zaid's retraining continued at Almaza with seven flights in Gladiators (L8005, L8017, L8020 and L8021) between 6th and 19 October, followed by his first experience of a Harvard on 28 October with *Qa'id Sirb* Hasib as first pilot. The last of these was on the 31st when Abu Zaid made his first solo flight in a Harvard. All these Harvard flights were in serial number AJ838, and this page of his logbook was signed off by Muhammad Hafiz as CO of Almaza, though he may also have been CO of No. 2 (Fighter) Squadron.

From the 1st to 17 November Abu Zaid, and probably other previously grounded pilots, flew the REAF's two available Harvards (AJ838 and AJ842) intensively. In Abu Zaid's case this involved four flights with *Qa'id Sirb* Hasib as first pilot, with *Dabat Saff* Munir where Abu Zaid was first pilot, five flights with *Dabat Saff* Shams, and two flight with *Tayyar Thani* Ganzuri who was Abu Zaid's junior. Both Abu Zaid and Ganzuri would be killed during the course of the Palestine War. Abu Zaid also flew four solos. The last of his flights with Hasib were cross-country to Alexandria and back on 17 November, taking off from Almaza at 1000 and from Alexandria at 1215. On both these occasion Abu Zaid was second pilot. Their Harvard was AJ838, which would be written off in an accident 36 days later. The completion of Abu Zaid's training of the Harvards was again signed off by Hafiz as OC Almaza.

For Abu Zaid and some of his colleagues, their refresher courses were rapidly followed by further training in the RAF's No. 71 OTU at Ismailia, with flying starting on 23 November 1943 and concluding on 11 January 1944. At the beginning of this course, Abd al-Hamid Abu Zaid had been assessed by No. 71 OTU as average F (Fighter?) pilot, average as a pilot-navigator, average at bombing but below average in air gunnery, which was hardly surprising given the REAF fighter pilots' lack of proper training since the start of the Second World War. He would, however, improve.

Until 6 December Abu Zaid was again flying Harvards, though now in RAF machines. His first was with Flight Lieutenant Furneaux of the RAF as first pilot in EX113. The same day Abu Zaid took up another Harvard (EX146) followed by another flight in the same aeroplane, again with Furneaux as first pilot. In fact, Flight Lieutenant Furneaux seems to have been Abu Zaid's designated flying instructor, taking the Egyptian pilot up 10 times, in nine of which the British pilot was first pilot. Abu Zaid also flew with Squadron Leader Sizer as first pilot, and with Warrant Officer McLaren as first pilot. His other Harvard flights were solos, the machines being EX103, EX105, EX111, EX113, EX115 and EX146.

These sorties were followed by Abu Zaid's first flight in a Hurricane (A6223) on 6 December 1943, which was of course an RAF machine of No. 71 OTU. It was followed next day by a further flight in a Harvard (EX105) with Flight Lieutenant Furneaux, perhaps to iron out some error on Abu Zaid's part, itself followed by a second Hurricane flight (in A7988) on that same day. Thereafter Abu Zaid made 35 flights in various No. 71 OTU Hurricanes during December 1943 and January 1944. The type of training was only specified when it involved something extra, such as the cine camera work on Z5443 on 15 December, and "To Mansura via Vic base" in V6979 on 29 December.

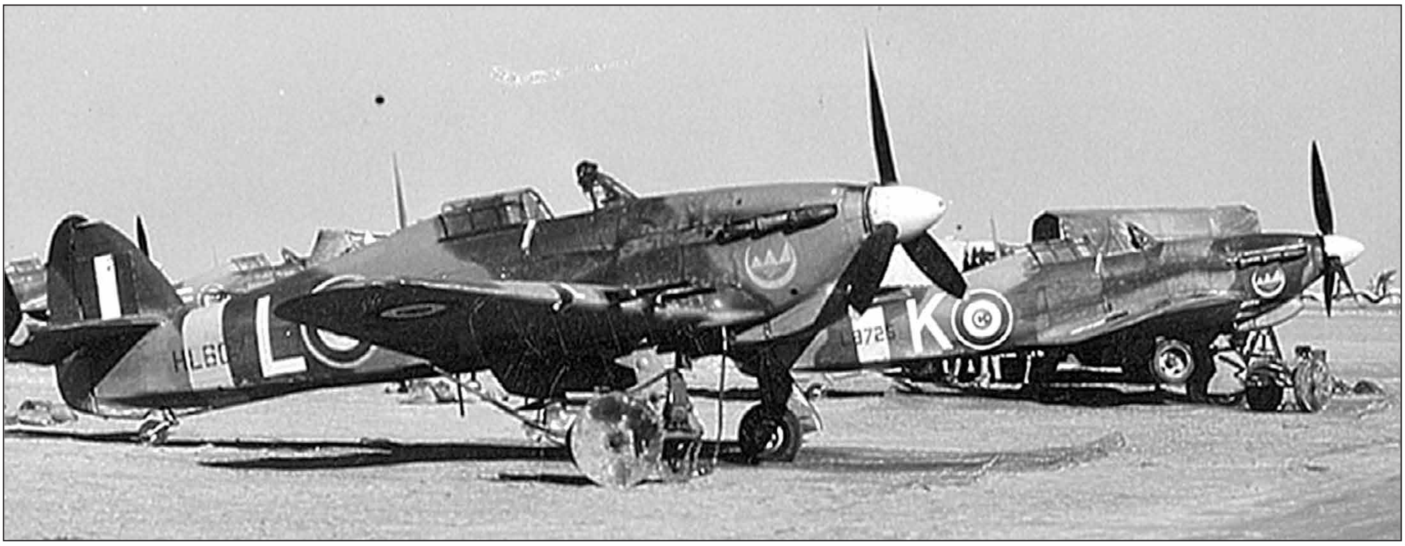
The RAF No. 71 OTU Hurricanes that Abu Zaid flew during this period were: A7988, A9170, A9223, A9224, BT316, P2660, V6813, V6874 (twice), V6877, V6979, V7101 (three times), V7256, V7408, V7727, Z226 (probably an incomplete RAF number), Z4012, Z4194 (twice), Z4196 (twice), Z4508, Z4573, Z4626 (three times), Z4700 (twice), Z4836 (twice), Z4850, Z5330 and Z5443. Until 11 January 1944 Abu Zaid was still on the course at No. 71 OTU, as shown by the serial numbers of the Hurricanes he flew on the 9th, 10th and 11th. However, this part of his logbook was not signed off by an RAF officer.

Instead, he had a break from flying until 22 January, by which time *Tayyar Awal* Abd al-Hamid Abu Zaid was attached to No. 2 Squadron, though perhaps still officially being a member of No. 17 Squadron REAF. The matter is further confused by the fact that, according to information supplied to the author by the EAF Historical Department, Muhammad Abd al-Hamid Abu Zaid was attached to No. 2 Squadron REAF from 2 January 1944 onwards. Perhaps during his first few flights of 1944, from the 9th to the 11th clearly in British rather than Egyptian aeroplanes, his attachment to No. 2 Squadron had been confirmed though he was actually just completing his extra training at No. 71 OTU.

While previously grounded pilots were being retrained, a number of more senior men were sent on advanced or specialised RAF courses. The REAF was, of course, very keen to upgrade its staff capabilities which had traditionally been rather low. As soon as Britain allowed this to happen, the first two REAF officers were sent to a RAF Staff College at Haifa in Palestine in the first part of 1943. Being considered very "hush-hush" at the time, men like Hassan Tawfiq were not supposed to tell their families where they had gone, or indeed where they had been, once they returned to Egypt.

The first men sent to Haifa were soon followed by others, including Qa'id Sirb Ibrahim Gazerine who, an Advisory Mission Report stated; "was one of the Egyptian students on 11 Staff Course and was one of the five officers to obtain a B category. The influence of these officers is considerable (in the REAF) and they have rendered valuable service to the Air Advisor". Gazerine himself told the author that he found the course at Haifa to be one of the most useful episodes his air force career.

A smaller number of REAF officers attended courses in Britain, though only two appear to have been sent to the RAF College at Cranwell during the Second World War. One of them was M.



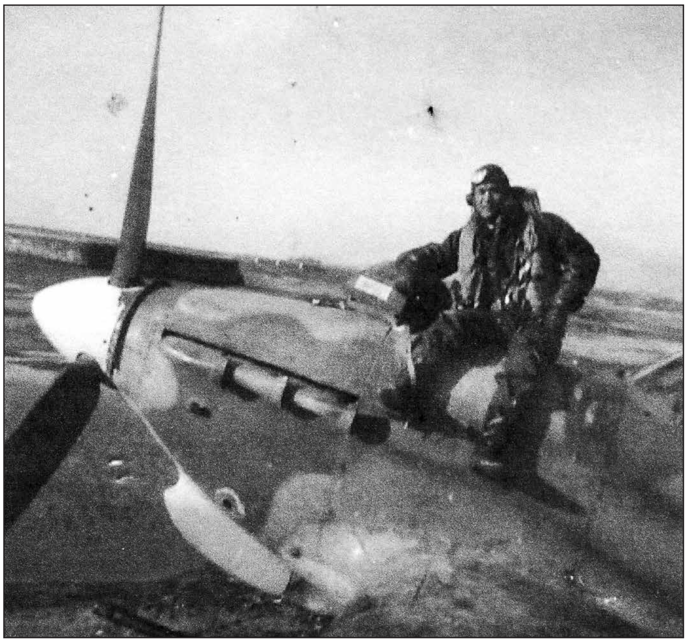
Hawker Hurricane Mk. IICs (number HL607, individual code L, and number LB726 code K) of No. 2 Squadron REAF in 1944, probably photographed at Idku west of Alexandria. This squadron's distinctive emblem of the three Pyramids of Giza within a horizontal crescent recalls the emblem of the conservative and nationalistic *Misr al-Fatat* or Young Egypt political party earlier in the war. (W. Kain collection)

Hussain Khairy who had been a pupil in England's prestigious Eton College which he left in 1942. Khairy was aged 19 when he was accepted by No. 19 FTS (RAF), Cranwell College in England, as a member of No. 50 Course, starting on 5 October 1943 with the rank of Leading Aircraftsman (LAC). On returning to Egypt he was commissioned as an officer in the REAF.

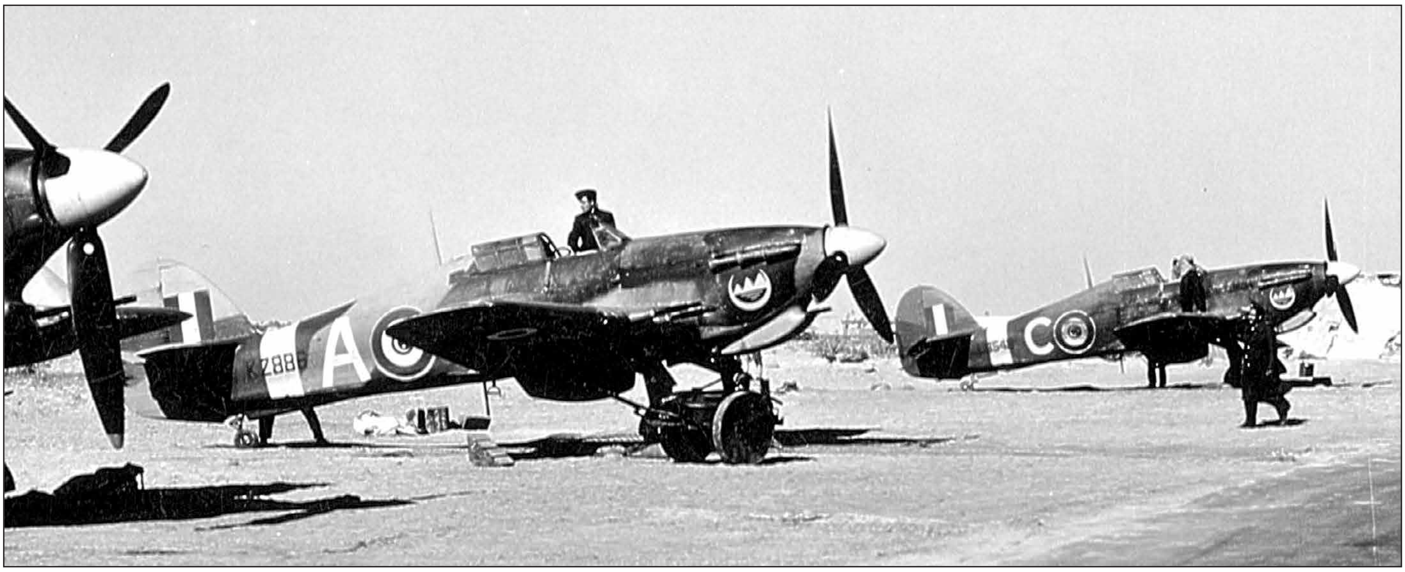
Some of the REAF's most respected officers avoided getting involved in supposedly anti-British activities and were selected for the most prestigious training courses. One such was Salih Mahmud Salih who commanded No. 1 (AC) Squadron throughout most of the Second World War, before becoming the Air Force's senior Army Liaison Officer probably in 1944 if not already in late 1943. Meanwhile No. 1 was clearly one of the REAF's "neglected squadrons" during the final years of the war. At the end of 1942, this unit still had 14 Lysanders and, although these machines were suffering from fabric deterioration due to prolonged exposure to the sun, their crews continued to train in formation flying and aerial photography. According to the Advisory Mission Report of July 1943, No. 1 Squadron's Lysanders had flown 100 hours of searchlight cooperation over the preceding six months, which was greatly appreciated by the Egyptian Army's air defence units. The men certainly considered their battered aeroplanes to be hopelessly out of date, but some of the Lysanders would soldier on until the Palestine War in 1948 when they were still able to undertake useful tasks despite the growing strength of the Israeli Air Force. Towards the end of 1943, No. 1 Squadron did receive a handful of overhauled Hurricane Mk. Is which had previously been flown by No. 6 (now or soon to be renumbered No. 17) Squadron. The aeroplanes nevertheless still lacked VHF radios.

No. 2 Squadron was still under *Qa'id Sirb* (Flight Lieutenant), acting *Qa'id Asrab* (Squadron Leader) Muhammad Hafiz whom British records described as "very competent". Ali Muhammad Labib, who had been so astonished at the luxury of Prince Isma'il Da'ud's desert banquet some years earlier, now served as second-in-command responsible for communications. Like No. 1 Squadron, No. 2 Squadron was not given priority, despite being a fighter unit. Consequently No. 2 Squadron's 15 serviceable Gladiators remained at Suez for the air defence of the southern part of the Suez Canal throughout most of 1943. Here one section stood at readiness all the time, despite the fact that their effectiveness was seriously limited by their lack of the VHF radios standard on more modem RAF machines. Officially the old RT communications channel with the RAF Sector Operations Room at Shandur had been discontinued but, refusing to be denied an at least theoretical combat role, the pilots of No. 2 Squadron arranged on their own initiative to have a watch kept specially for them on the old radio frequencies. By this means they were able to scramble in pursuit of enemy intruders on two confirmed occasions in the early summer of 1943, according to the Advisory Mission's Report of February 1944, while a number of other attempts to intercept high-flying Junkers reconnaissance aircraft were unconfirmed. The results were hardly encouraging, but these sorties were nevertheless among the last occasions when Gladiators tried to enter air combat. Iraqi Gladiators would fire their guns in anger around two years later, but these were against ground targets (see Chapter Two), and again in Palestine in 1948.

After the Italian surrender on 8 September 1943, No. 2 Squadron found that it was being readied for re-equipment with 18 ex-RAF



A Hawker Hurricane Mk. IIC (Tropical) operated by the REAF during the Second World War. It was not apparently one of the aeroplanes forming part of No. 2 Squadron in 1944, so this Mk. IIC Hurricane was probably amongst those used by No. 17 (ex-No. 6 Squadron) during 1943. (Author's collection)



Two more Hawker Hurricane Mk. IICs of No. 2 Squadron REAF (number KZ886, individual code A, and probably LB548, code C). Muhammad Abu Zaid's logbook shows that he flew both these aeroplanes during his time with No. 2 Squadron at Idku and later at Marsa Matruh, carrying out tedious though far from danger-free convoy protection duties. (W. Kain collection)

REAF officers who were selected to attend a British Staff Course looked back on the event with great pleasure. For example, Hassan Tawfiq wrote the names of all his colleagues on this "class photograph" of the course held in July 1944. Flight Lieutenant Hassan Tewfiq is himself at the top-right, and next to him is Flight Lieutenant Muhammad Sidqi Mahmud al-Milaygi. All the rest are British or Imperial officers, mostly of Squadron Leader rank. (Hassan Tewfiq archive)

Hawker Hurricanes Mk. IICs which had been expected to go to No. 17 Squadron. These machines apparently arrived before the end of the month and enabled the pilots, who had almost certainly been trained on Hurricanes by RAF OTUs in Egypt, to finally let go of their archaic Gladiators. These newer – though by means new – fighters meant that No. 2 Squadron was the first REAF unit to get VHF radios. The squadron's pilots now began training on their Hurricane Mk. IICs alongside the RAF's No. 208 Squadron which had itself recently converted from Hurricanes to Spitfires.

No. 208 Squadron had more experience of working with Egyptians than most RAF squadrons, having trained along the REAF's No. 1 Squadron when both units received Westland Lysanders back in 1939. Since then, No. 208 Squadron had endured a far more active war than had its Egyptian colleagues, flying Lysanders and then Hurricanes during the North African and Greek Campaigns, converting to Curtiss Tomahawks and having recently been sent to Iraq and Lebanon. By December 1943 it had been withdrawn from the front to train at al-Bassa in Palestine. On 27 December 1943 the men of No. 208 Squadron learned that their Hurricanes would be replaced by Spitfires; these starting to arrive in January 1944.

Meanwhile No. 208 Squadron also had men in Egypt, perhaps for training or logistical reasons, and seems to have had a significant link with Hilwan, which may have accounted for the unit's link with the REAF's No. 2 Squadron when it came to training.

Some of No. 2 Squadron's pilots had, according to British sources, achieved "exceptionally good" results while attending the RAF Air Gunnery School. In a letter written in November 1943, Group Captain Chick, head of the Air Advisory Mission, informed his British superiors that the REAF's No. 2 Squadron was trained and ready and its aircraft had been offered to RAF MED-ME (RAF Mediterranean and Middle East Command) for convoy protection work. The offer had, however, been declined because it was not thought to be needed. This was presumably before the British campaign to drive the Germans from the Greek Dodecanese Islands failed. No. 2 would, however, eventually receive Hurricanes and would use them in convoy protection.

Despite being somewhat neglected in terms of its equipment, No. 3 (Communications) Squadron remained one of the busiest in the REAF, ferrying senior men around the country and taking Egyptian officers for staff training at Haifa in Palestine. Some of its pilots had been transferred from the almost redundant No. 4 (Bomber) Squadron, including Adli Kafafi and Shafiq Hassib. The latter recalled that he and Adli, who had joined the Air Force at the same time, now flew REAF Ansons to Haifa, Beirut, Damascus and Cyprus.

Some of the Ansons were ex-RAF machines recently handed over to the REAF, but also included some of those sold to Egypt back in 1939. For example, Anson 205 (originally W205) was the aeroplane in which General Aziz al-Masri and his two pilot colleagues tried to fly out of Egypt in 1941. On 2 March 1943 this machine and the Avro 652 number 204 (originally W204 and here wrongly identified as an Anson) took off to escort, or more likely to transport, a group of senior Egyptian Army officers around the Sudan. The Avro 652 had to make an emergency landing in the desert 95kms east of Asyut, which it did successfully, whereas the Anson completed the flight successfully. According to the British Advisory Mission Report of July 1943, No. 3 Squadron, which still included the royal aeroplanes as a flight but not yet as a separate unit, currently had on strength two Ansons (presumably one Anson and the Avro 626), two Percival Q6s, one Avro Commodore, one Hart variant and one DH Moth. Another source also refers to No 3 Squadron also having one Magister as a squadron hack in February 1943, so the report's reference to an extremely old Moth might be an error.

No. 4 (Bomber) Squadron was undoubtedly a neglected unit. In the summer of 1943, it was still equipped with 13 Hawker "Egyptian" Audaxes which lacked bomb sights. Nor was there a proper bombing range now available for training. Instead, the Audaxes continued to help the Egyptian Army's anti-aircraft units' sighting practice at Port Said. Some of No. 4's pilots were, in fact, serving in other squadrons or would soon go to the RAF Transport and Ferry Group.

Several of No. 5 Squadron's pilots would similarly be transferred to other squadrons, usually, it seems, on a temporary basis, including Abd al-Hamid Abu Zaid. According to the Advisory Mission's July

A Supermarine Spitfire Mk. Vc (number EP315, code letter F) of the RAF's Operational Training unit at Idku towards the end of the war. This aerodrome had been home to No. 2 Squadron REAF until the second half of 1945. EP 315 was not, however, one of those transferred to No. 2 Squadron REAF from a RAF OTU during 1944. (Author's collection)

1943 report, No. 5 had recently been sent to Suez from Almaza and although its 14 aged Gladiator were still having serviceability problems, all the pilots had now flown solo at night. This was just as well, as by October 1943 two Gladiator pilots (apparently of both Nos. 2 and 5 Squadrons.) had reportedly come close to intercepting enemy reconnaissance aircraft in the Suez area.

The renumbering of No. 6 Squadron as No. 17 would not apparently be permanent, though it did last throughout 1943. The renumbering of this squadron remains something of a mystery because it is not entirely clear when or why it came about. The unit does not appear to have been particularly badly affected by the so-called subversion crisis of the summer of 1942, yet some documents seem to indicate that the renumbering occurred before the demoralising attempt to equip No. 6/17 Squadron with Tomahawks. Its Commanding Officer *Qa'id Sirb* Salah Farid, whom the British had considered "unsatisfactory", was still in command during the early part of 1943. He is later reported to have been chosen as the Arab League's resident spokesman in London in the mid-1970s.

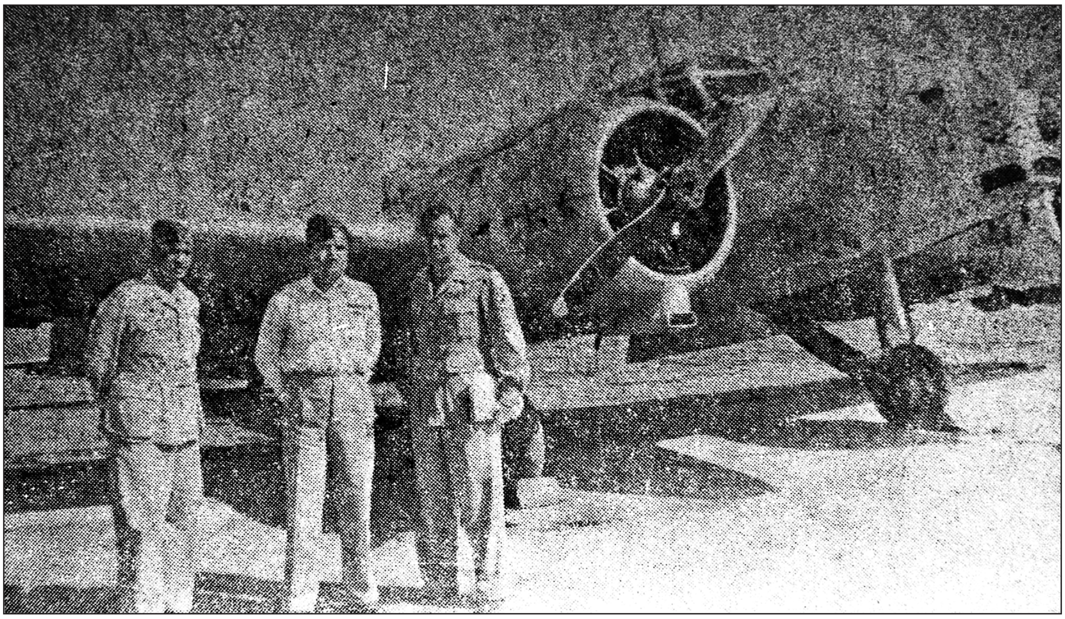
No. 6/17 now gradually replaced its Hurricanes with P-40 Tomahawks. The first six of the latter started to arrive in April 1943 while the Hurricanes initially went into storage. Some would later re-emerge because the Tomahawks proved virtually useless while a few others were passed on to No. 1 Squadron. Eventually the REAF accepted up to 16 Tomahawks, but an Advisory Mission Report shows that around July 1943 No. 6/17 Squadron was operating one Flight of six Tomahawks, one Flight of six Hurricanes, and, rather unexpectedly, one Flight of Hawker Harts. Meanwhile the habitual shortage of spare parts continued to hamper training.

Adli Kafafi (right) and two of his REAF colleagues, probably of No. 3 Squadron, towards the end of the Second World War or shortly afterwards. During this period the Avro Ansons of No. 3 Squadron often flew to and from Haifa, Beirut, Damascus and Cyprus. (Kafafi family archive)

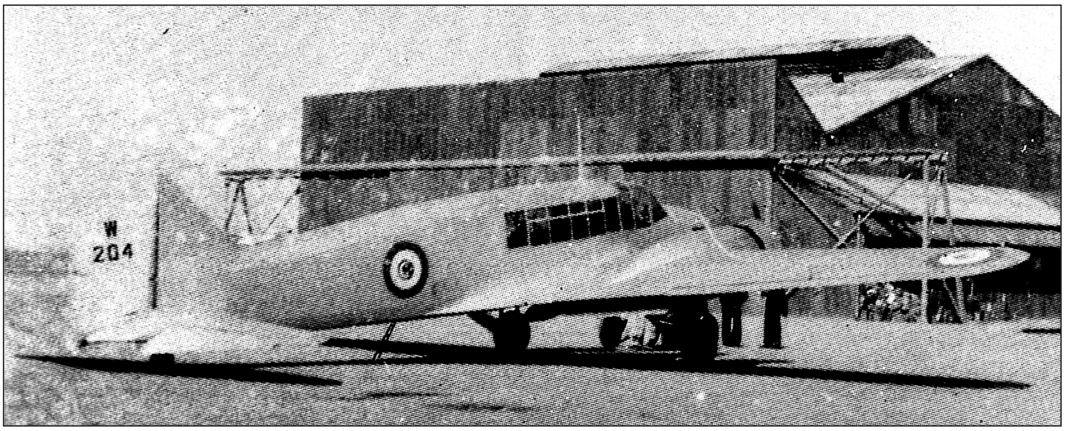
At first No. 6/17 Squadron had fewer problems with its Curtiss Model H-81-A2, P-40B (or C) Tomahawk IIs than did the Americans and British, but this contented phase was all too brief. After a relatively short period of use, the Tomahawks became so unreliable that they could not be used over the sea. In fact, one Tomahawk was soon lost because of engine failure during take-off. The main problem stemmed from the fact that their unreliable American magnetos had been replaced by British ones which were too heavy for the couplings and therefore tended to break. Convoy protection had been intended as one of the squadron's primary roles. By October No. 6/17 Squadron was to be under the RAF's Air Officer Commanding Air Defence East Mediterranean for Air Defence of the Nile Delta, alongside No. 2 Squadron. Unfortunately, even this proved unworkable with such unreliable aeroplanes. The only answer was for the unit to be given more Hurricanes. So the British offered to loan some to enable No. 17, as it was currently called, to cooperate fully with the RAF. The Egyptian government regarded Hurricanes as now outdated and asked to buy Spitfire Mk. Vs but this the RAF was not yet prepared to do, though later it loaned a few Spitfires.

During 1943 the REAF acquired a new unit which nevertheless officially remained part of the British RAF. This was part of a substitution scheme designed to release RAF pilots for more active duties. The result was also unorthodox because Egypt was still technically a neutral country, not yet having declared war on Germany. The unit in question was No. 1411 Meteorological Flight based at Heliopolis, which had been formed in January 1942. Squadron Leader W.C. Williams was in command and his Gladiator pilots had to make two climbing flights per day to 600/730 metres. Getting information about the weather was, of course, their purpose and such Meteorological Flights were vital to the effective operation of other more obviously combatant formations in the RAF. Nor was the work without its dangers, having to fly regular and sometimes strenuous flights in all weather conditions.

Records for No. 1411 Meteorological Flight are only available for the period from January to June 1942, so it unclear whether the Gladiator Mk. Is mentioned during this period were still on strength when the entire unit was handed over to the REAF, especially as longer distance flights over the Western Desert were curtailed, perhaps temporarily, in May 1942. This was because of a shortage of serviceable aeroplanes. What is certain is that No. 1411 Meteorological Flight's surviving Gladiators were henceforth flown by REAF pilots; the machines mentioned between January and June 1942 being K6138 (still on strength after the REAF took over), K7893 (still



Adli Kafafi and two colleagues next to one of the Avro Anson Mk. 12 machines which the REAF received from the British RAF in 1945. (Kafafi family archive)



The old Avro 652 (number W204) of the REAF's No. 3 Transport Squadron had been in need of repair since 1943, when it was reportedly suffering from a shortage of spare plywood. Nevertheless, the Avro 652 and Anson W205 (the machine in which General Aziz al-Masri had tried to fly out of Egypt in 1941), transported a group of senior Egyptian Army officers around the Sudan in March that year, the Avro 652 making a successful emergency landing in the desert on the way. (EAF Museum collection)

on strength after REAF took over), K7925, K7943, K7961, K7963 (returned from Detached Section with guns and wireless fitted on 10 May), K7963 (sent to the Advanced Met Section at Ma'aten Bagush on 6 March, then returned with guns and wireless fitted on 10 May), K8003 (temporarily rendered unserviceable on 25 March because of a damaged tail incidence gear), K8008 (slightly damaged in a forced landing due to engine failure on 26 January, but still on strength after REAF took over), and N5825.

In August 1943 the takeover of No. 1411 Meteorological Flight by a REAF commanding officer, pilots and maintenance crews was complete. Between then and February 1944 the Advisory Mission reported "nothing but praise" from their British colleagues. While under REAF command, the Meteorological Flight continued to receive its orders directly from the RAF, and even so, its Gladiators and subsequently at least some of its Hurricane Mk. Is carried Egyptian national markings. This was despite the fact that they were still officially being part of the RAF and retained British serial numbers. In February No. 1411 Meteorological Flight was formally handed over to the REAF, thereby ceasing to be technically a British RAF unit. However, another source stated that early in 1947 No. 1411 Meteorological Flight and its aeroplanes would be handed back to the RAF – with the apparent exception of Hurricane number KZ883, named Mina.

At first twice-daily flights continued to be carried out at 1100 and 2300 hours, but towards the end of 1944 these were replaced by a single climbing sortie at 0100 hours. By this time several Egyptian pilots were becoming highly competent at night flying. Even so there were a few accidents, with one REAF pilot being killed as a result of a bad weather forced landing in his Gladiator near Khanka on 30 October 1944.

Meanwhile, the substitution scheme designed to release RAF, Commonwealth and Empire pilots for more active operations resulted in a number of REAF pilots being selected for service in the RAF's No. 216 Transport and Ferry Group. No. 216, led by Air Commodore Whitney Straight from September 1942 to June 1945, was responsible for flying combat aircraft to and from the Middle East and Africa. The RAF Ferry Command had itself been created in July 1941, drawing personnel from both the armed services and civilian life, including women pilots. No. 216 Group had already been set up at Takoradi, in what is now Ghana, in July–August 1940, under Group Captain Thorold; its first operation involving six aeroplanes taking place in September that year. Initially the Group ferried short-range aeroplanes, while longer range types were sent to Egypt via Gibraltar and Malta. The men at Takoradi also ferried aircraft to South Africa after they had been withdrawn from frontline service.

On 21 May 1942 the unit became No. 216 (Ferry) Group, again being renamed as No. 216 (Air Transport and Ferry) Group on 9 September 1942. It now became part of the Allied Mediterranean Air Command. Some months later, on 25 March 1943, No. 216 Group became part of the RAF's new Transport Command under Air Chief Marshal Frederick Bowhill, with the primary task of dealing with air reinforcements for the North African and Mediterranean operational theatres. At the time of the Allied invasion of Sicily (Operation Husky from 9th to 17 August 1943), No. 216 (Air Transport and Ferry) Group was led by Air Commodore Whitney Straight and consisted of Nos. 17 and 28 Squadrons South African Air Force, and Nos. 117, 173, 216, 230 and 267 Squadrons, RAF.

The Egyptians were all volunteers and in July 1943 the first group consisted of six of the REAF's most skilled junior pilots, *Tayyar Thani* (Pilot Officers) Rafa'i, Umar Bakir, Iffat, Hashad and Sa'ad al-Din Sharif. They were under a very experienced Squadron Leader who is unfortunately unnamed. Sa'ad al-Din Sharif had joined the REAF early in 1940, as was probably also the case with his fellows. Eventually, more than 20 REAF aircrew served in No. 216 Transport and Ferry Group, gaining very valuable experience in the process. Meanwhile the first six men found themselves flying assorted types of aeroplane to and from different fronts in the Middle East and North Africa.

According to a letter sent to the author by *Qa'id Asatil Jawwiyah* (Air Marshal, as he then was) Sa'ad al-Din Sharif in 1973, he and his colleagues were sent for training to the RAF's No. 3 ADU (Aircraft Delivery Unit). This apparently became No. 2 FU (Ferry Unit) of No. 216 Transport and Ferry Group in 1943. Shortly after becoming operational, Sa'ad al-Din Sharif found himself unexpectedly under fire over or near Sicily, probably shortly before Axis forces evacuated the island as a result of the Allied invasion. In his own words; "Once Flight Off. Sharif after a trip from Tunis to Catania, Sicily, found the right wing of his Spitfire was shot by Fascist guns". Then there was the danger of bringing sometimes barely serviceable or roughly patched up, damaged aeroplanes back from the front, and of having to fly across the Mediterranean in highly unpredictable weather. Sa'ad al-Din Sharif later became one of President Nasser's personal pilots, narrowly escaping being shot down by an Israeli Meteor night-fighter shortly before the outbreak of the 1956 Suez War, and was subsequently an ADC to President Sadat in 1973.

Less exciting was the role of REAF and Egyptian Army personnel in different aspects of the Allied substitution schemes. These included helping the British and their allies by operating barrage balloons and some wireless stations in Egypt. The balloon defences in northern Egypt were more important than they might sound because the Germans beat the British in a race to take control of the ex-Italian Dodecanese Islands in the Aegean. As a result, the Luftwaffe continued to send reconnaissance flights over Egypt well into 1944. The Egyptian Army had, in fact, offered to man balloon defences along the Suez Canal in April 1943. On 11 May approval was given for two Egyptian-manned balloon squadrons, a role which made considerable demands on Egyptian military manpower and technical skills though not, of course, on flying skills.

Considerable information can be found about the operation of such barrage balloons in Egypt in a British document from early February 1942, with the supremely military title of *Overseas Balloons & Barrages: Technical Aspects. doc 16A: Mark VI-Barrages Overseas*. It shows how complex such a seemingly straightforward task actually was. At that time there were seven balloon squadrons in Egypt and Palestine, all under one command, plus a probable depot and the possibility of three further squadrons. They were: No. 971 Squadron IE at Alexandria with 45 balloons in three Flights, No. 972 Squadron IE at al-Qantara with 15 balloons in two Flights, No. 973 Squadron IE at Port Said with 15 balloons in two Flights, No. 974 Squadron IE at Kasfarit with 45 balloons in three Flights, No. 975 Squadron IE in the Canal Zone (no specific location, so perhaps moveable) with 45 balloons in three Flights, No. 976 Squadron IE in Haifa (probably, according to this document) with 45 balloons in three Flights, No. 977 Squadron IE at Alexandria (probably, according to this document) with 45 balloons in three Flights, Nos. 978 to 981 "as yet unknown squadrons", No. 980 Squadron IE M.N.B.D.O II (perhaps a depot) with 50 balloons.

A typical example of the manpower required by a barrage balloon unit is provided by one of those based in Malta or Crete in February 1941. It consisted of eight officers under a Squadron Leader; the others being five Flying Officers for Administration, Balloons (x2), Equipment, Accounts, and two Pilot Officers for Balloons. The airmen and civilians under their command consisted of one W/O Balloons, one Sergeants and two AC A.C.H. General Duties, one Corporal and five AC Telecommunications, and one Corporal Armourer. The actual Balloon Operators consisted of one Corporal and three ACs per balloon plus 10 in reserve, and three ACs for fabric repair. The overall list of personnel for the balloons consisted of one Flight Sergeant, one Sergeant, 11 Corporals and 36 Aircraftsmen. The Administrative and Accounts Section had one Corporal and one Aircraftsmen, while the Equipment Section had two Clerks and three Aircraftsmen. In addition there were two Corporals and an Aircraftsman as Cooks and Butchers, three Aircraftsmen as Drivers, one Aircraftsman Electrician, one Corporal and an Aircraftsman as Equipment Assistants, one Corporal as Fitter (Motor Transport), one Aircraftsman as Motor Transport Mechanic, one Corporal and two Aircraftsmen as Hydrogen workers, one Corporal as Medic, one Aircraftsman as Motor Cyclist, one Corporal and five Aircraftsmen as RT Operators, one Corporal and one Aircraftsman as W.O.M.S.

Because this unit was stationed next to the coast it also included one Aircraftsman as a Marine Fitter, and a Motor Boat Crew of one Corporal and two aircraftsmen. There were also civilian attached; namely two waiters, two cooks, two storemen and either 32 or 46 general labourers. For a unit using Mk. VI Balloons, the mechanised transport was expected to consist of a light passenger car, a three-ton tender, a 15cwt Ford van, a motor cycle and a side-car, and two bicycles. Again, because this balloon squadron was based on the coast, it also had one seaplane tender.

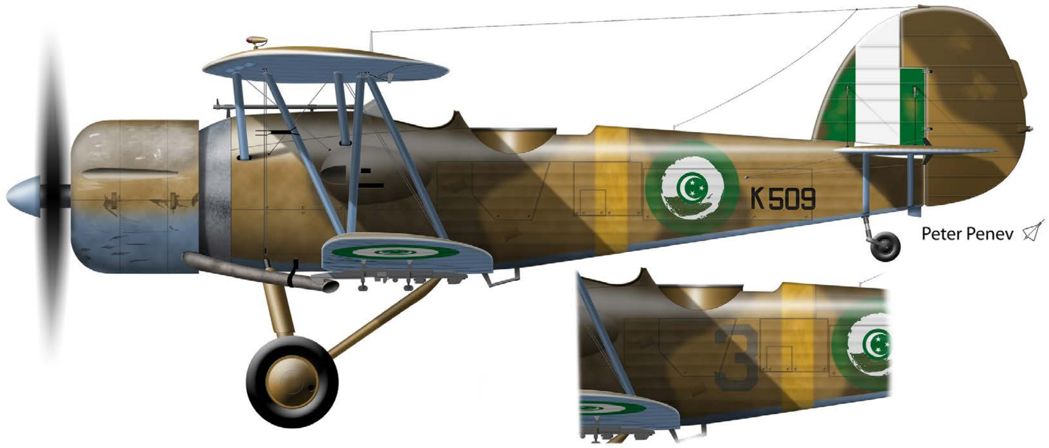
Replacing such units would make considerable demands upon the Egyptians, but in May 1943 the British approved the setting up of two REAF balloon squadrons of about 500 men, most of whom were drawn from the Army rather than the Air Force. They were trained by No. 206 Wing RAF at Ismailia and eventually took over Nos 971, 974 and 980 Squadrons, forming the balloon defences in Port Sa'id, Suez and Alexandria. As such they became Nos. 1, 2 and 3 Balloon Squadrons REAF. Technical tasks were largely carried out by REAF personnel, mostly NCOs and Warrant Officers under *Qa'id Asrab* (Squadron Leader) Salih and *Tayyar Awal* (Flying Officers) Makkawi and Salah al-Din.

On 17 December 1943 a provisional agreement between the British and Egyptian authorities was drawn up, whereby Egyptian wireless operators, largely it seems drawn from the REAF, would take over "non-operational" wireless stations in the Nile Delta. By then the defeat of Axis forces in North Africa had had a profound impact in Egypt and its armed services. Nevertheless, according to Abd al-Latif Baghdadi, hope lingered amongst some within the Egyptian officer corps that they could still take revenge for the humiliations their country had suffered in 1942. Members of some previously separate political groups began to come together to form new, and occasionally very different, alliances. Other REAF officers focussed on their Air Force careers and, in the British military slang of the time, "kept their noses clean". One such was Muhammad Hassan al-Maghribi, who is understood to have been appointed "chief of pilots" in 1943, probably meaning that he was now the chief instructor.

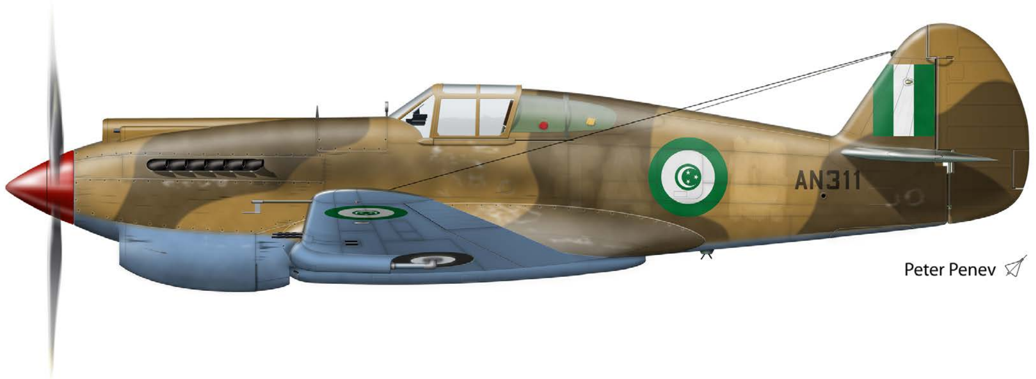
It was around this time that a middle ranking Army officer named Gamal Abd al-Nasser started to come to the fore. Having returned to Cairo from duty in the Sudan and Western Desert, Nasser joined a faculty of the Military College as a teacher. Links between him, Baghdadi, Abd al-Ra'uf, Wagih Abaza, Khalid Muhi al-Din, Salah Abd al-Hakim and some others grew stronger. Hassan Izzat and Anwar Sadat were, however, still in prison. The various increasingly dissident or revolutionary groups were by no means united – and never would be – with Wagih Abaza and Abd al-Latif Baghdadi of the REAF developing closer links with the Muslim Brotherhood. This would store up significant problems for the future.

Another interpretation of these complex manoeuvrings has Abd al-Ra'uf, who already had strong connections with the Brotherhood, recruiting six other officers between mid-1943 and the end of the Second World War in 1945. They were Gamal Abd al-Nasser, Khalid Muhi al-Din, Kamal al-Din Husayn, Sa'ad Tawfiq, Salah Khalifa and Husayn Hammuda. These seven apparently went on to form the first "cell" to be clearly affiliated with Hassan al-Banna's Muslim Brotherhood, though only Abd al-Ra'uf, Salah Khalifa and Husayn Hammuda could be described as Islamists in their political opinions. The others remained above all Egyptian nationalists who were nevertheless temporarily impressed by the Muslim Brotherhoods' influence, dedication and apparent selflessness.

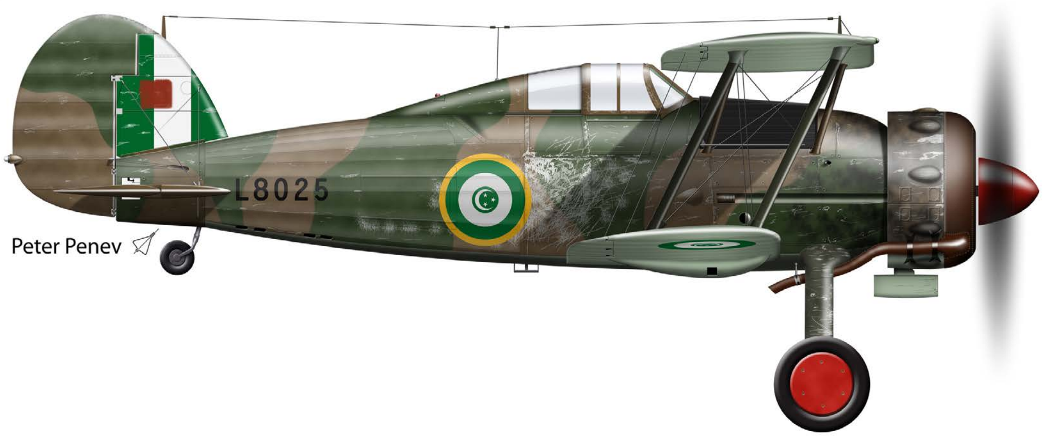
Meanwhile, according to Hassan Tawfik's daughter Muna, the majority of REAF officers spent the rest of the war tacitly agreeing not to speak of the humiliating and embarrassing Crisis of 1942. Egyptian civil aviation also carried on as best it could through the remaining war years, with Misrair mainly involved in flying VIPs and military personnel in and out of Egypt. By 1943, however, its aeroplanes were practically worn out. In response to Misrair's requests for new equipment, it was allowed to take over a number of the ex-RAF Ansons which the British had initially passed on to the REAF. Some of these had apparently been flown out from Britain. Misrair may also have been given a few DH Moths and Miles Magisters by the REAF, though this is not certain. It is also interesting to note that the final version of S. Hilmi's aeroplane with an aerofoil-shaped fuselage, the Helmy Aerogypt IV, made its maiden flight from White Walthan airfield in England in 1943, this time with only two 65 hp Continental A65 engines and a tricycle undercarriage.



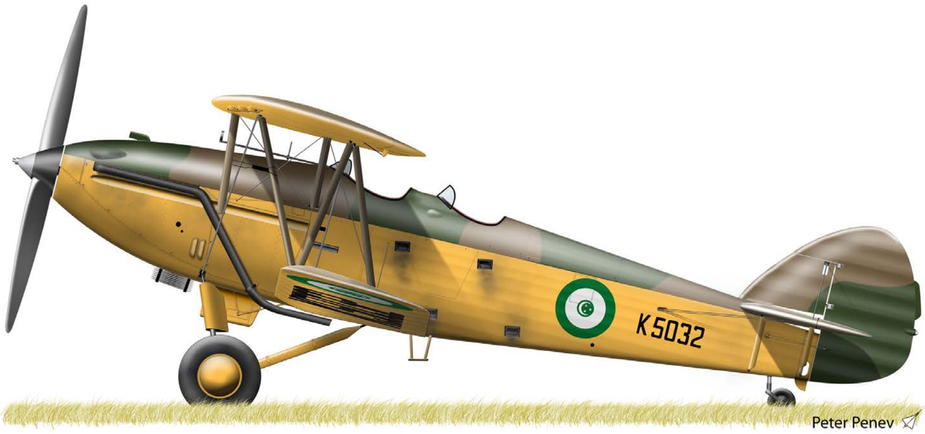
The artwork shows Hawker Egyptian Audax (K509) of No. 4 Squadron REAF in early 1943. Although this Egyptian Audax formed part of No. 4 Squadron, it was used in the advanced or bombing training role. Therefore, both the forward-firing machine-gun and the observer's machine-gun have been removed, although the bomb-racks remain. The machine has a British RAF-style "sand and stone" desert camouflage scheme with RAF sky blue underneath. During its service in the REAF this clearly became very worn and chipped. There is also an area of bare metal immediately behind the engine cowling, perhaps the result of recent repairs. Furthermore, the rudder probably comes from another aircraft, because the dividing lines between its camouflage scheme do not align with the colours on the rear of the fuselage, while the upper part of the rear vertical green line of the REAF national marking is also missing. The large number on the side of the fuselage below the observer's cockpit and the "trainer yellow" band around the fuselage may have been later additions when the remaining Egyptian Audaxes were being used as advanced trainers. (Artwork by Peter Penev)



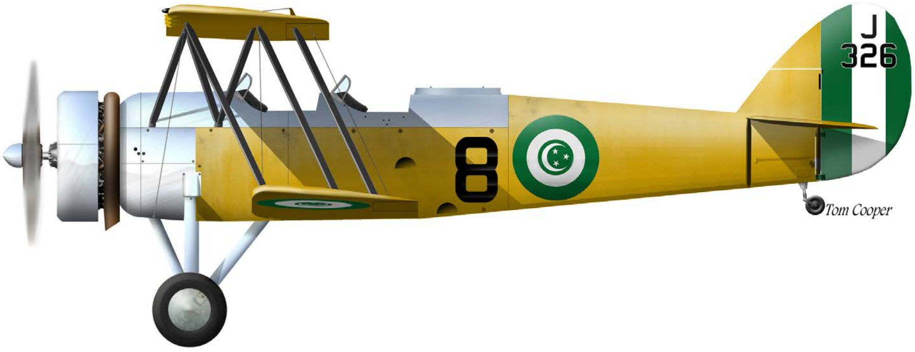
Curtiss P-40 Tomahawk Mk. IIb, ex-RAF serial number AN311, was one of those transferred to the REAF in April 1943. It had previously been used by No. 2 Squadron of the South African Air Force, when it also carried the individual code letters TA-C. On 21 November 1942, when it was being flown by Lieutenant Eric Saville, this aeroplane was in collision with an Italian Macchi MC.200 Saetta, resulting in severe damage to its starboard wing. Lieutenant Saville landed safely and the P-40 was repaired before being allocated to the REAF. While in Egyptian service with No. 6 Squadron, the only visible change appears to have been the addition of Egyptian national markings and the removal of the identification letters TA-C. It is therefore still in RAF-style "sand and stone" desert camouflage with sky blue underneath. (Artwork by Peter Penev)



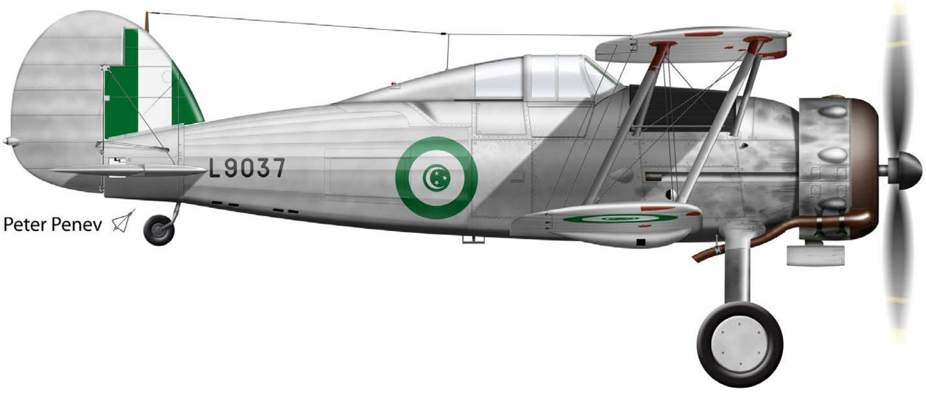
Gloster Gladiator Mk. I/II, REAF/RAF No. 1411 Meteorological Flight, c.1944. This Gloster Gladiator, serial number L8025, is a Mk. I machine brought up to Mk. II standard. It was amongst the first to be delivered to the REAF and after long service in one of the REAF's fighter squadrons – probably No. 2 – it was transferred to No. 1411 Meteorological Flight. This was theoretically an RAF unit, though entirely operated by Egyptian REAF personnel. However, Gladiator L8025 suffered minor damage during a night landing on 20 June 1945. The now worn and battered camouflage scheme is the same Temperate European paintwork worn when these Gladiators were originally supplied to the REAF, though the underneath is now entirely pale blue. Though it is part of No. 1411 Meteorological Flight, this machine does not yet have the visible meteorological equipment mounted on later Meteorological Flight types. All the armament has been removed and the radio aerials are of the old (pre-VHF) type mounted on top of the rudder and on top of the right wing. The dark rectangle on the tailfin is unexplained but might be a repeat of the Flight identity colour red, as also seen on the wheel-discs and spinner. (Artwork by Peter Penev)



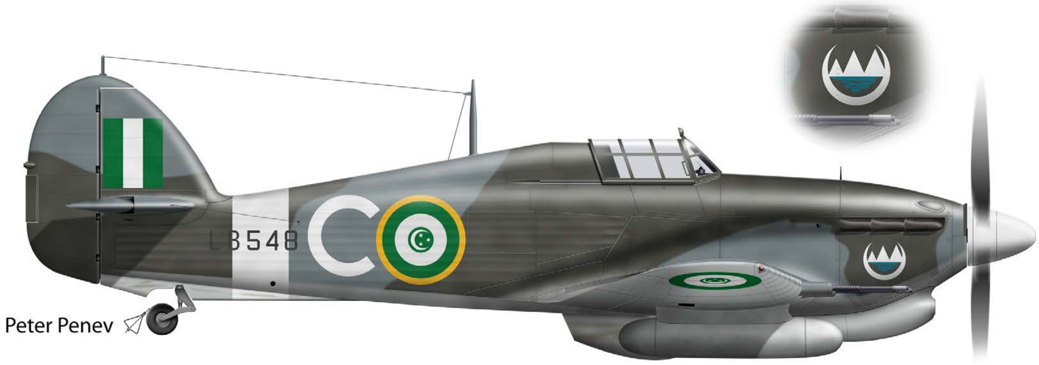
Hawker Hart Trainer (Tropical) (REAF, unit unknown, c.1943). The REAF acquired a variety of Hawker Harts for training and communications purposes in the latter part of the Second World War. They included at least three different versions and all retained their RAF serial numbers including Hawker Hart Trainer (Tropical) number K5032, shown here. The upper surfaces are believed to have been in a Temperate European camouflage, while the sides and underneath are trainer yellow. The normal REAF national markings lack a crown in the outer green ring of the fuselage roundel, while the inner green disc appears smaller than usual. In contrast, the roundels under the wings are very large, almost reached the leading and trailing edges. There are no green and white striped national markings on the tail and there is a small open area, not covered with fabric, beneath the tailplane. (Artwork by Peter Penev)



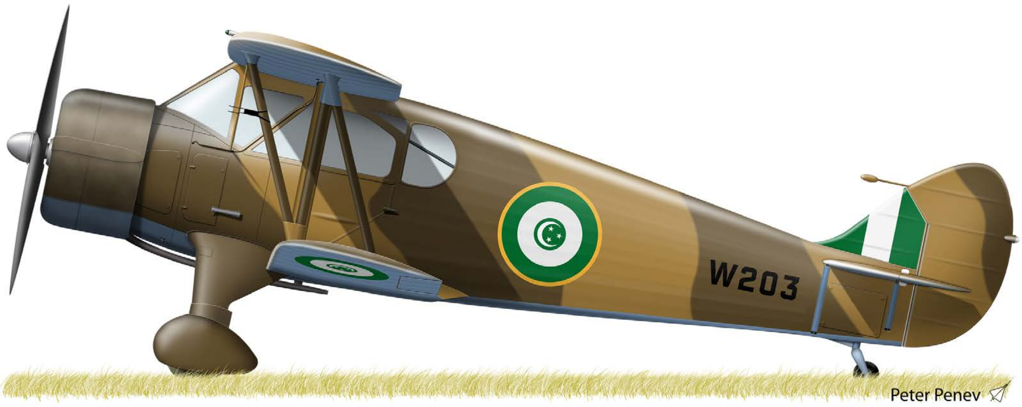
Avro 626 (REAF, Flying Training School, 1943). According to the British Advisory Mission Report of July 1943, the FTS at Almaza had 16 Avro 626s which were considered out of date for the role expected of them, and mostly used for anti-aircraft sighting exercises in the Port Said area. These Avro 626s were almost certainly amongst those REAF aeroplanes which had suffered from severe fabric deterioration as a result of standing so long in the fierce Egyptian sun and might have been repainted in overall trainer yellow. The rear cockpit is no longer used and all equipment concerned with the observer's gun has been removed. The REAF national markings are unchanged, except that there is no longer a crown in the outer green ring of the fuselage roundel. This machine has the individual large code number 8 on the side of the fuselage, while the serial number is probably no longer written under the lower wing. The serial number of the aircraft carrying number 8 is unknown, but of those which were certainly at the Almza FTS at this time, J326 has been chosen for this reconstruction because this was the first Avro 626 which Muhammad Abu Zaid flew at the start of a refresher course when he returned to flying duties, after being sent to the Army for disciplinary reason following the crises of 1942. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



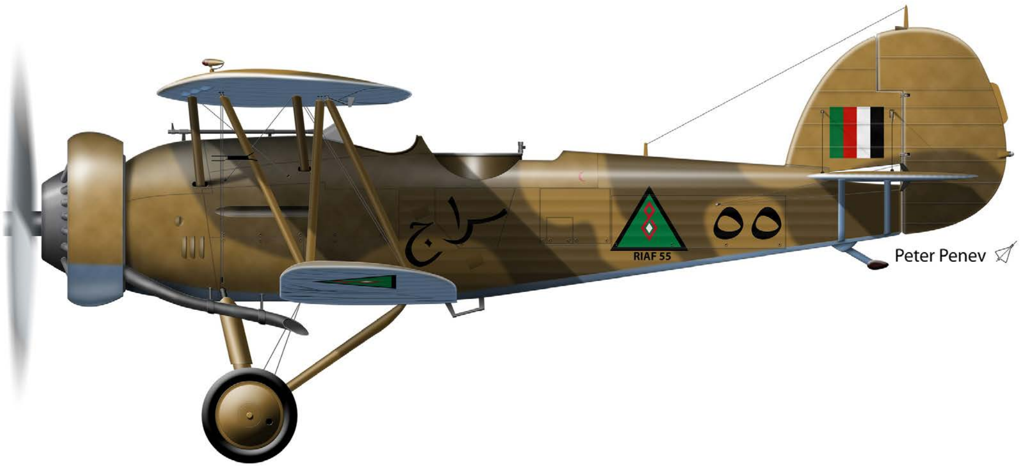
Gloster Gladiator Mk. II (RAF/REAF No. 1411 Meteorological Flight, 1945). Gloster Gladiator Mk. II, serial number L9037, had previously formed part of the REAF's No. 5 Squadron before been transferred to No. 1411 Meteorological Flight. This was still technically an RAF unit but was entirely run by the REAF, and its aeroplanes had Egyptian national markings though still with their original RAF serial numbers. By the final year of the Second World War, modern radio equipment had at last been installed, resulting in changes to the aeroplane's aerials. It also had visible meteorological equipment on the wings. This machine was almost certainly amongst those which were given new fabric by REAF technicians, which was probably also when L9037 was repainted with overall silver dope. Although the weapons have been removed, they were sometimes replaced when such machines were operating away from the Egyptian heartland around Cairo. (Artwork by Peter Penev)



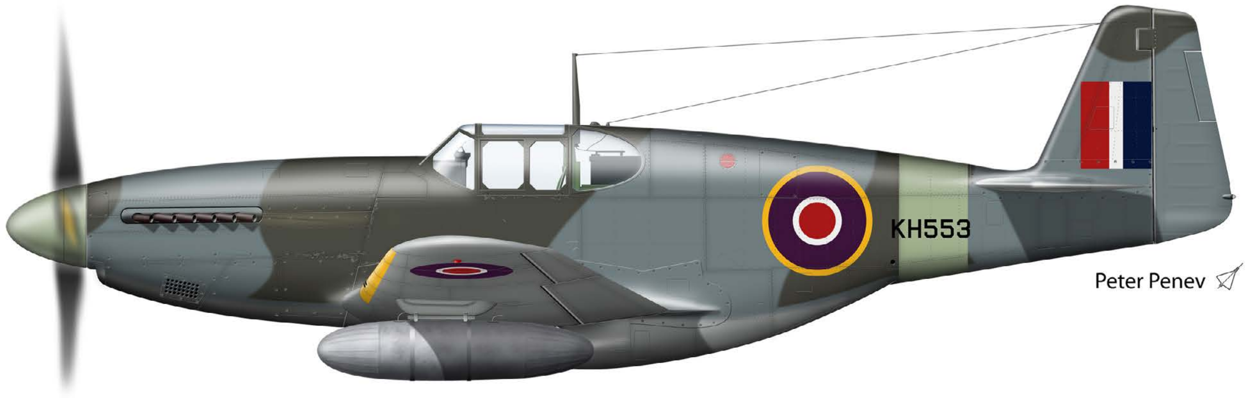
Hawker Hurricane Mk. IIc Trop. (REAF, No. 17/2 Combined Squadron, 1944). In most available photographs, the paintwork of the Hawker Hurricanes of No. 17/2 Combined Squadron appears considerably worn, probably indicating that these pictures were taken after the machines had been carrying out shipping protection patrols for a long time. They had been transferred directly to the REAF rather than being allocated to a British squadron, and so were almost new when they came to the REAF. Their colours are usually shown as "sand and stone": actually, it was dark green and slate grey with light grey underneath, which was the standard Mediterranean and European scheme adopted by the RAF later in the war. The colours of the crescent and three pyramids motif painted on the noses of these Hurricanes is unknown but might have been based upon the green and white elements of the Egyptian flag. The black serial number LB548 on the rear fuselage shows that this machine had been built between April and September 1943. Here the Hurricane has also been provided with long-range additional fuel tanks beneath its wings, suitable for the convoy protection work. (Artwork by Peter Penev)



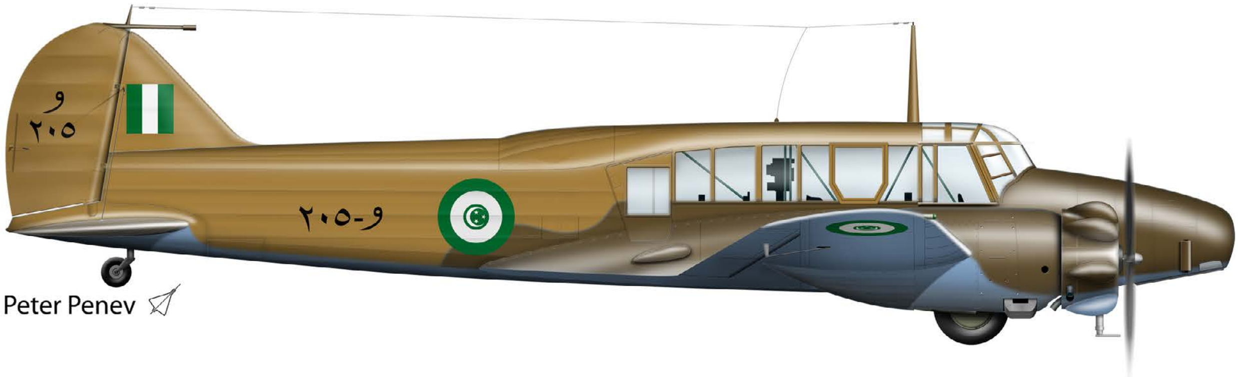
Avro 641 Commodore (REAF, No. 3 Squadron, c.1944). At some date later in the Second World War, the REAF's Avro 641 Commodore (serial number W203) was repainted in a camouflage scheme; probably an RAF-style "sand and stone" desert camouflage with yellow ochre and dark brown above and sky blue underneath. By that date, however, it no longer had the modified engine cowling necessitated by the instillation of a more powerful engine (see Volume 6). Either the new engine had itself been replaced, or the REAF actually had two Commodores, as suggested by one unconfirmed source. An Avro Commodore of No. 3 Squadron, which was now said to have had serial number W203, was damaged in a bad landing on 21 October 1946. (Artwork by Peter Penev)



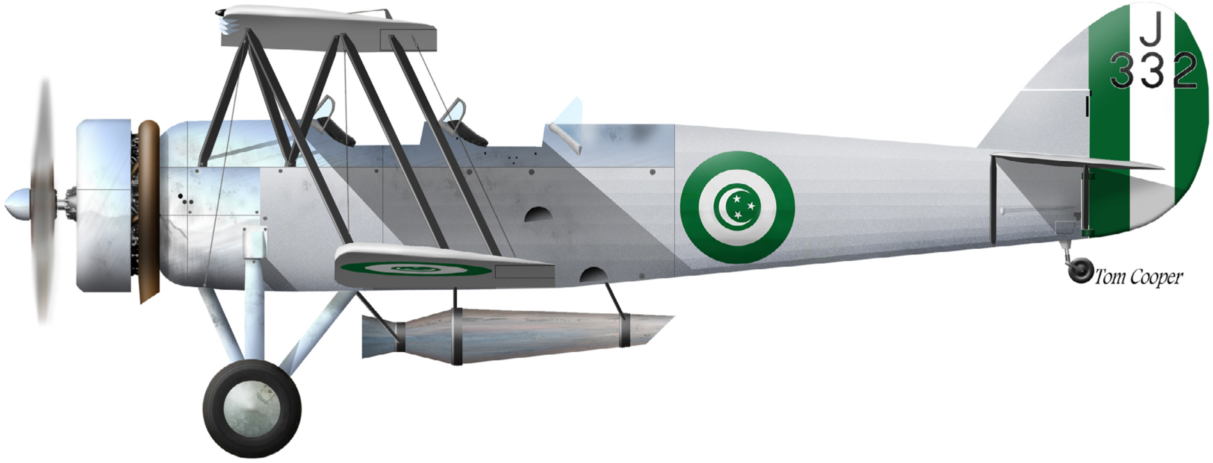
Hawker Nisr Iraqi Audax (RIrAF, Flying Training School, 1945). By 1945 all of Iraq's remaining Hawker Nisr "Iraqi Audaxes" had reportedly been transferred to the RIrAF's Flying Training School. Some, and perhaps all, of them were now painted in an overall camouflage scheme which was likely to have used British RAF "sand and stone", yellow ochre and dark brown paint for the upper surfaces, with sky blue underneath. On this particular Nisr the area of the yellow ochre "sand" had clearly been extended so that the serial number 55 stood out against the lighter colour. Now being confined to the training role, the machine is unarmed and it is interesting to note that its radio aerial system has also been changed. Furthermore, the Iraqi national markings are smaller than they had been earlier, as is the Arabic serial number 55 on the rear fuselage. This number is repeated as RIAF 55, in small lettering under the national marking triangle on the fuselage. It was a system that would be used on more modern RIrAF aircraft for several years. The small red crescent on the upper side of the fuselage behind the observer's cockpit almost certainly marked the position of an emergency first aid compartment. The Arabic inscription under the cockpits is incomplete in the only available photograph, and is also unexplained. However, it might be the Arabic word saraaj meaning "lamp" and was perhaps followed by another unseen word which is lost in shadow. (Artwork by Peter Penev)



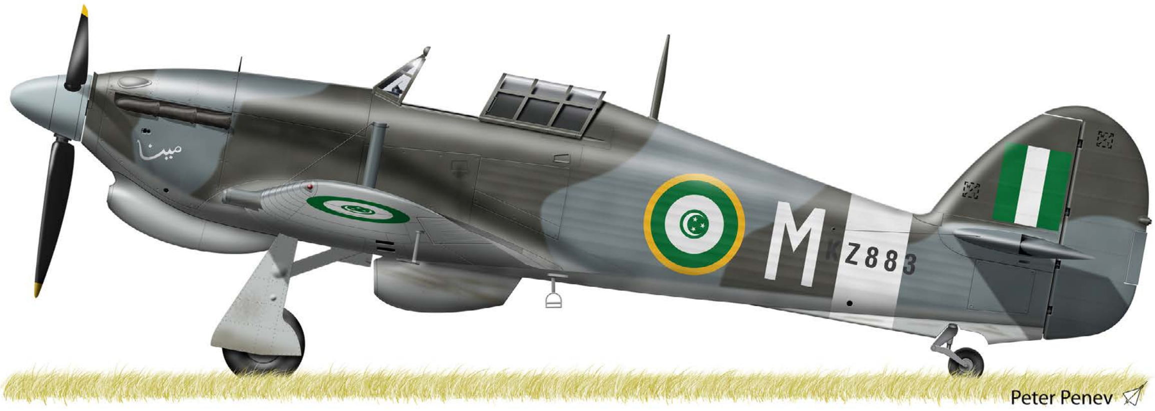
North American P-51 Mustang Mk. III (RAF, No. 216 Transport and Ferry Group, September 1944). *Tayyar Thani* (Pilot Officer) Rafa'i of the REAF was killed when this Mustang exploded during a thunderstorm 95km east of Algiers. Egyptian records state that Rafa'i died on 24 September 1944 but the operational records of No. 216 Transport and Ferry Group state that the aeroplane was lost and its pilot killed on the 29th. The Mustang Mk. III involved (serial number KH553) was being ferried by No. 3 FU. The fact that the aeroplane crashed during the turbulence of a storm suggests that it was one of the versions which did not have a dorsal fin modification. It had probably been manufactured late in 1943 and was on its way to the Italian front from Casablanca, via North Africa, probably intended for the RAF's No. 112 Squadron or No. 213 Squadron. It had the early form of sideways opening cockpit hood rather than the bubble, Spitfire-type, sliding so-called Malcolm Hood. It would almost certainly have had long-range additional fuel tanks for the delivery flight, as shown here. (Artwork by Peter Penev)



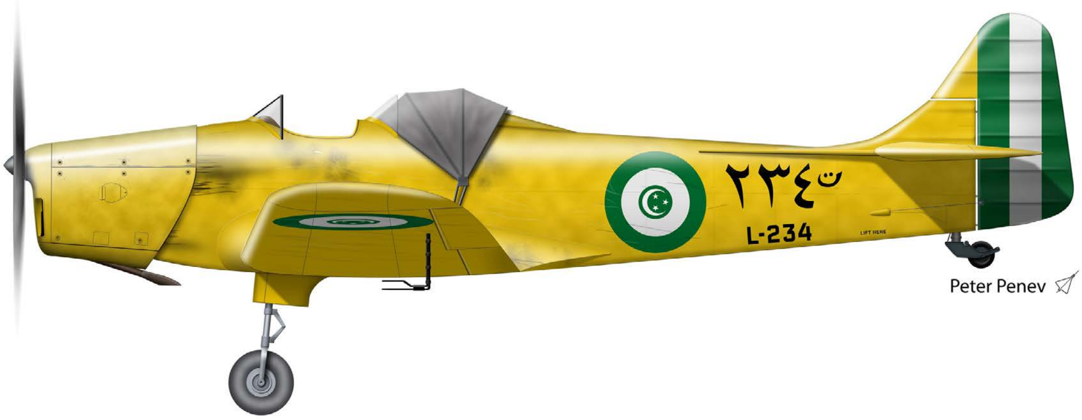
Avro Anson 1 (REAF, No. 3 Squadron, c.1946). No. 3 Squadron's Avro Anson, serial number W205, was the same aeroplane in which General Aziz al-Masri and two colleagues had tried to fly out of Egypt in 1941 (see Volume 6). That resulted in a forced landing and a small amount of damage to the machine. Subsequently W205 had been repaired, the gunner's turret removed, and was given a completely new colour-scheme. The latter was almost certainly desert warfare "sand and stone", though painted in much larger areas than was the case on British aircraft. The serial number was now also only written in Arabic numerals on the fuselage and the tail. Whether this new camouflage scheme was present when the Anson escorted or transported a group of senior Egyptian Army officers around the Sudan in March 1943 is unknown. It was, however, certainly in place in April 1946 when W205 accompanied Spitfires of the REAF's No. 6 Squadron to Damascus to take part in celebrations marking the departure of French troops from Syria. (Artwork by Peter Penev)



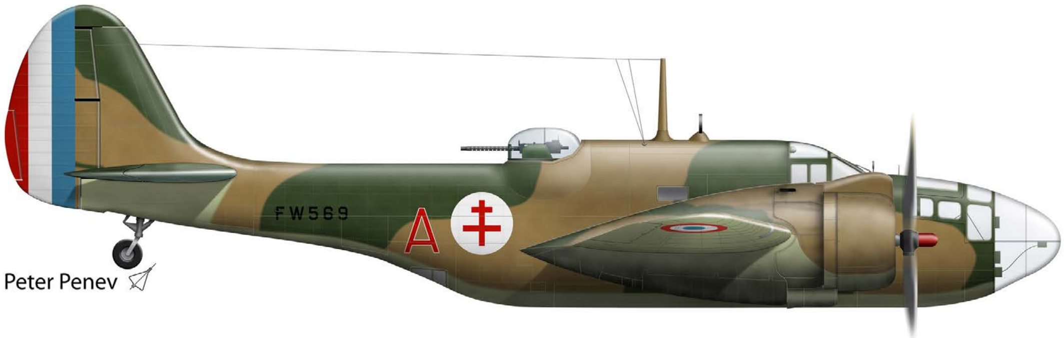
Avro 626 (REAF, used as a DDT duster during an anti-malaria campaign 1944). A serious outbreak of malaria in Upper Egypt from January to April 1944 resulted in several the REAF aircraft being equipped to spread DDT, to kill malaria-spreading mosquitos in their breeding grounds. At least one of the Avro 626s currently being used by the REAF's FTS at Almaza was committed to this task. A "dusting" canister for DDT was therefore mounted beneath its fuselage, with insecticide powder being expelled from the container by the pressure of air from the aeroplane's forward flight. Otherwise, this machine appears unchanged, still being an overall silver aluminium dope with the serial number J332 only painted on the rudder. The earlier crown in the outer ring of the fuselage roundel has also disappeared. There is, however, now a panel over the third or rearmost observer-gunner's cockpit which also has its own windscreen. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



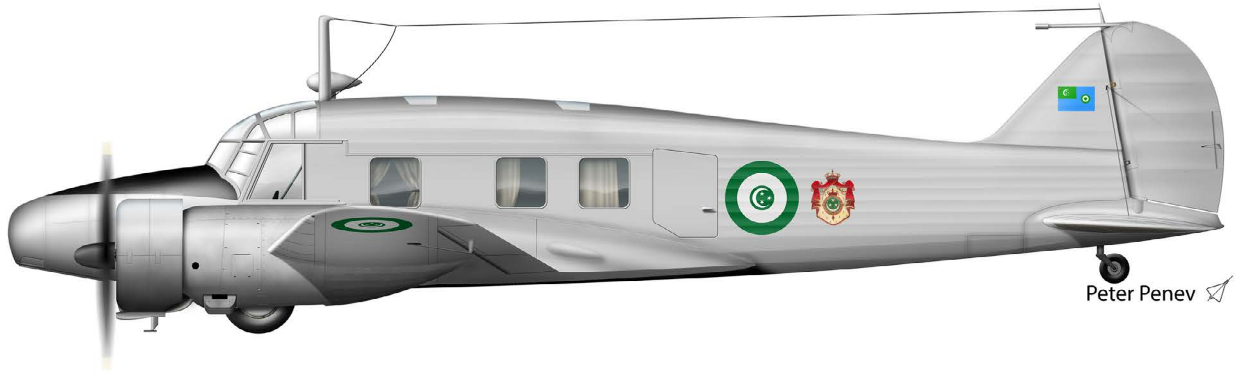
Hawker Hurricane Mk. 2 (Tropical) (REAF/RAF No. 1411 Meteorological Flight, 1945). This aeroplane was remembered by several early REAF pilots and their descendants as "the famous Mina". A large white individual code letter M was applied on the rear fuselage and on the leading edges of wings, between the empty cannon housings. The name Mina (Pharoah who united Upper and Lower Egypt in ancient times) was applied on either side of the nose. The guns have been removed and meteorological sensors added above the wings. This aeroplane had been built between 18 April and 29 September 1943 for the RAF but was transferred to the REAF before being allocated to a British, Imperial or Commonwealth unit. Although its camouflage has usually been interpreted as a "sand and stone" upper surface with sky blue underneath, the machine's early history suggests it was in a later wartime RAF "Temperate Day Fighter" camouflage. This would have consisted of ocean grey and dark green for the upper surfaces, with mid-sky grey underneath, plus a "sky" spinner and rear fuselage band. There is no evidence that it ever had the yellow wing leading edges which were given to most frontline British Hurricanes at this time. If repainted in 'sand and stone' at a later stage, the name Mina was removed from the right side of the nose but was retained or reapplied on the left. (Artwork by Peter Penev)



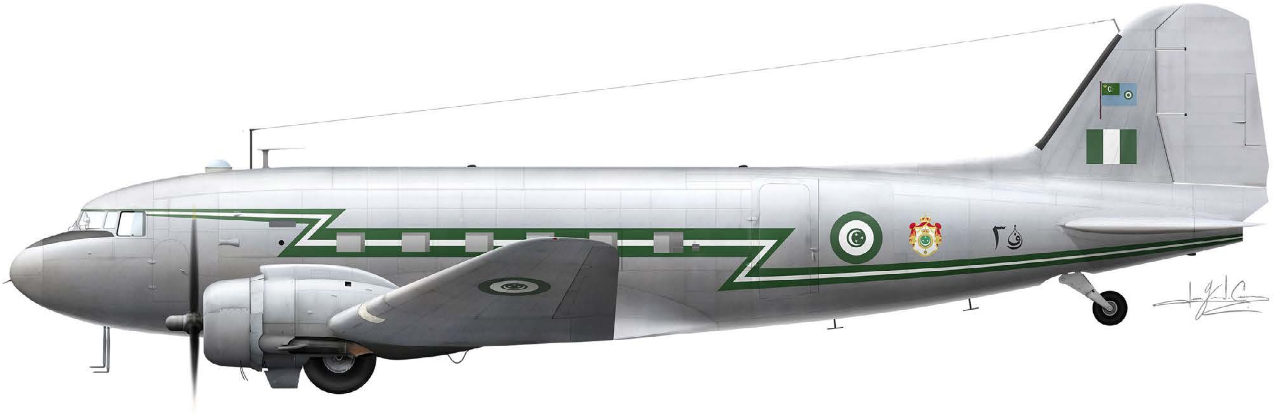
Miles M.14B Magister II (REAF, FTS, 1944). The REAF acquired a large number of Miles Magister primary training aeroplanes over several years. This particular machine, supplied to the REAF in February 1939, is a Miles M.14B Magister II, having a taller rudder which largely solved the spinning problems suffered by earlier versions. It is now painter entirely in trainer yellow, including the metal panels over the front of the fuselage and the engine. By the final years of the war these aeroplanes were, however, well-worn and somewhat battered. In many cases the spats on the undercarriage had also been discarded. Here the training aeroplane is shown with its grey rubberised canvas blind-flying hood closed. Note that the serial number, written in Arabic and European numerals on the rear fuselage, is actually different in these two forms, being written large as 234 T in Arabic, and smaller as L-234 in European characters. (Artwork by Peter Penev)



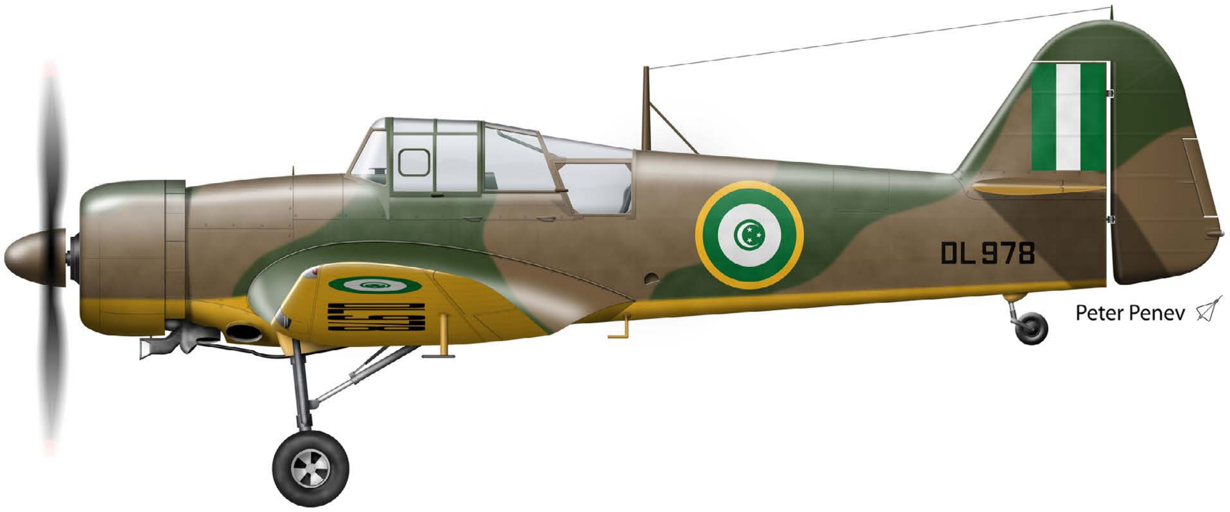
Martin 187 Baltimore B.V (French Armée de l'Air, GB I/17, Syria, 1946). The Martin 187 B.V (A-30A-MA), known outside the USA as the Baltimore 5, was an upgraded version of the American light bomber, powered by two 1,700hp (1,268kW) Wright R-2600-29 radial piston engines. This particular example formed part of the French Armée de l'Air bomber unit GB I/17. Named "Picardie", established in Lebanon as part of the RAF British Coastal Command before becoming part of the Free French Air Force (FAFL), operational from July 1943 in North Africa, primarily in the anti-submarine role. This unit, with its 10 Baltimores, was then integrated into the re-established French Armée de l'Air from 1945 to 1948. The aeroplane had normal French national markings, although the fuselage roundel was replaced by the red Cross of Lorraine on a white disc, the proud emblem of the FAFL. There were, however, no longer Crosses of Lorraine beneath the wings. The ex-RAF serial number FW569 was retained on the rear fuselage, along with the individual code letter A in red outlined in white on the rear fuselage and repeated smaller on the sides of the nose. The camouflage scheme is believed to have been the older RAF Temperate Land style of dark green and dark earth for upper surfaces, with duck egg blue/green underneath. (Artwork by Peter Penev)



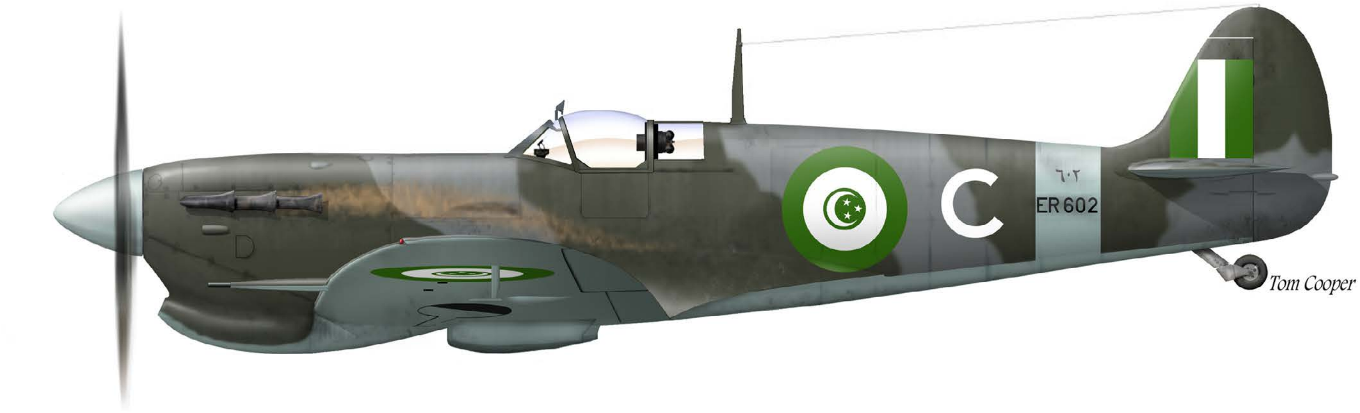
Avro Anson 12 (REAF Royal Flight c.1946). An Avro Anson 91 donated by the British Government to King Faruq for his Royal Flight was, despite having been fitted with luxurious appointments, nevertheless an ex-RAF machine. The original RAF serial number, NK150, had been removed. The machine was now an overall silver dope and bare metal with a pointed black anti-dazzle panel in front of the cockpit. Normal REAF roundels had been applied but there were no stripes on the tail. Nor was there a small crown in the outer ring of the fuselage roundel; this feature having been abandoned even on Royal Flight machines. Instead, this REAF Royal Flight aeroplane had an Egyptian royal coat-of arms behind the fuselage roundels and the flag of the REAF's Royal Flight on the tailfin. For reasons which remain unknown, no REAF serial number ever seems to have been applied, perhaps because King Faruq disliked the Anson, while loving his American Dakota. (Artwork by Peter Penev)



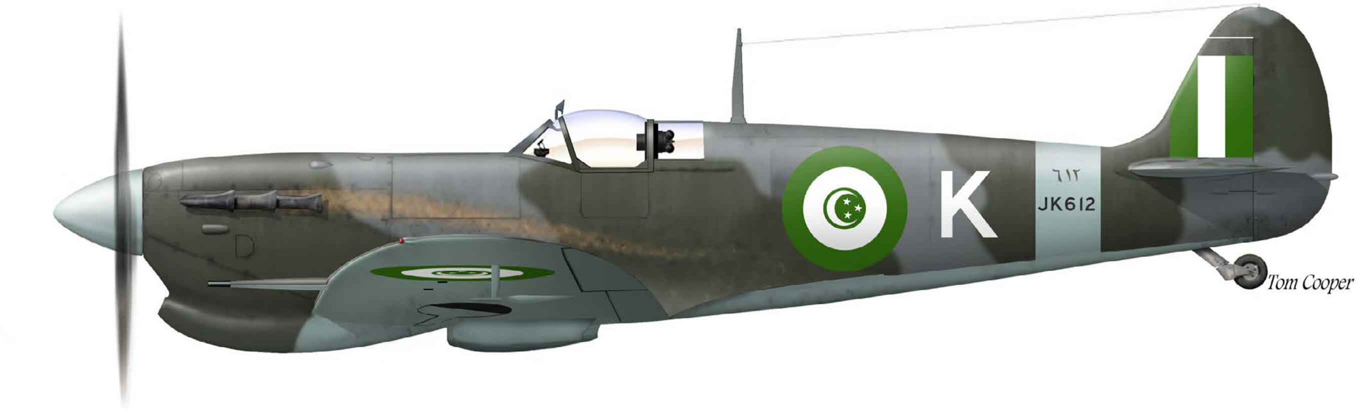
Douglas C-47 Dakota (REAF Royal Flight, 1946). As a royal or VIP transport, this Douglas C-47 Dakota has only one large door on the left side of the fuselage; the larger cargo door having been sealed up. The additional windows higher on the rear fuselage have also been removed. The aeroplane now has an overall brightly polished bare metal finish except for a black anti-dazzle panel in front of cockpit and, of course, quite striking markings. These include a doubled green lightning flash along the fuselage. On the tailfin are the vertical green and white stripes of the REAF and the flag of the REAF Royal Flight, which consists of a light blue RAF-style ground with a REAF roundel, plus the Egyptian royal banner in the top corner next to the staff. The markings on the rear fuselage behind the REAF roundel are the Egyptian royal coat-of-arms and the serial number F3 using an elaborate form of the Arabic letter F. This aeroplane later became number 113 of the Egyptian Republic's Presidential Flight around 1953. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)



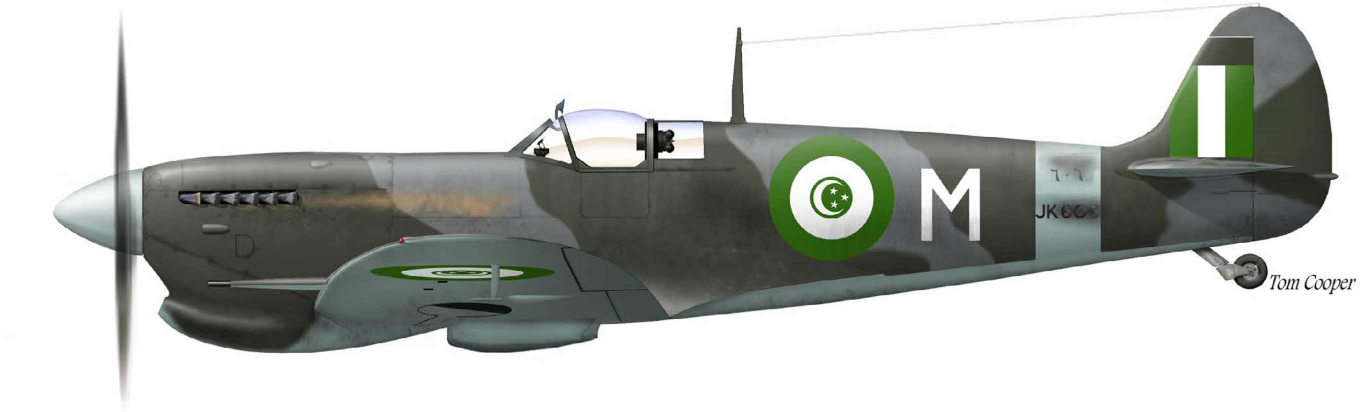
Miles Master M.19 Mk. II (REAF, Flying Training School, 1946). On this ex-RAF machine, nothing has changed except the replacement of RAF national marking with REAF national markings, though the fuselage roundel is still outlined in yellow. The Miles Masters that were eventually transferred to the Egyptians had previously been set aside for the Turks, and almost certainly had RAF Temperate Land brown and dark green upper surface camouflage with trainer yellow underneath. The black RAF serial number DL978 remains on the rear fuselage and in much larger lettering beneath the wings. However, there is evidence that these aeroplanes were given individual code letters in the REAF. Their wooden construction also proved to be very unsuitable in Egypt hot and extremely dry climate. (Artwork by Peter Penev)



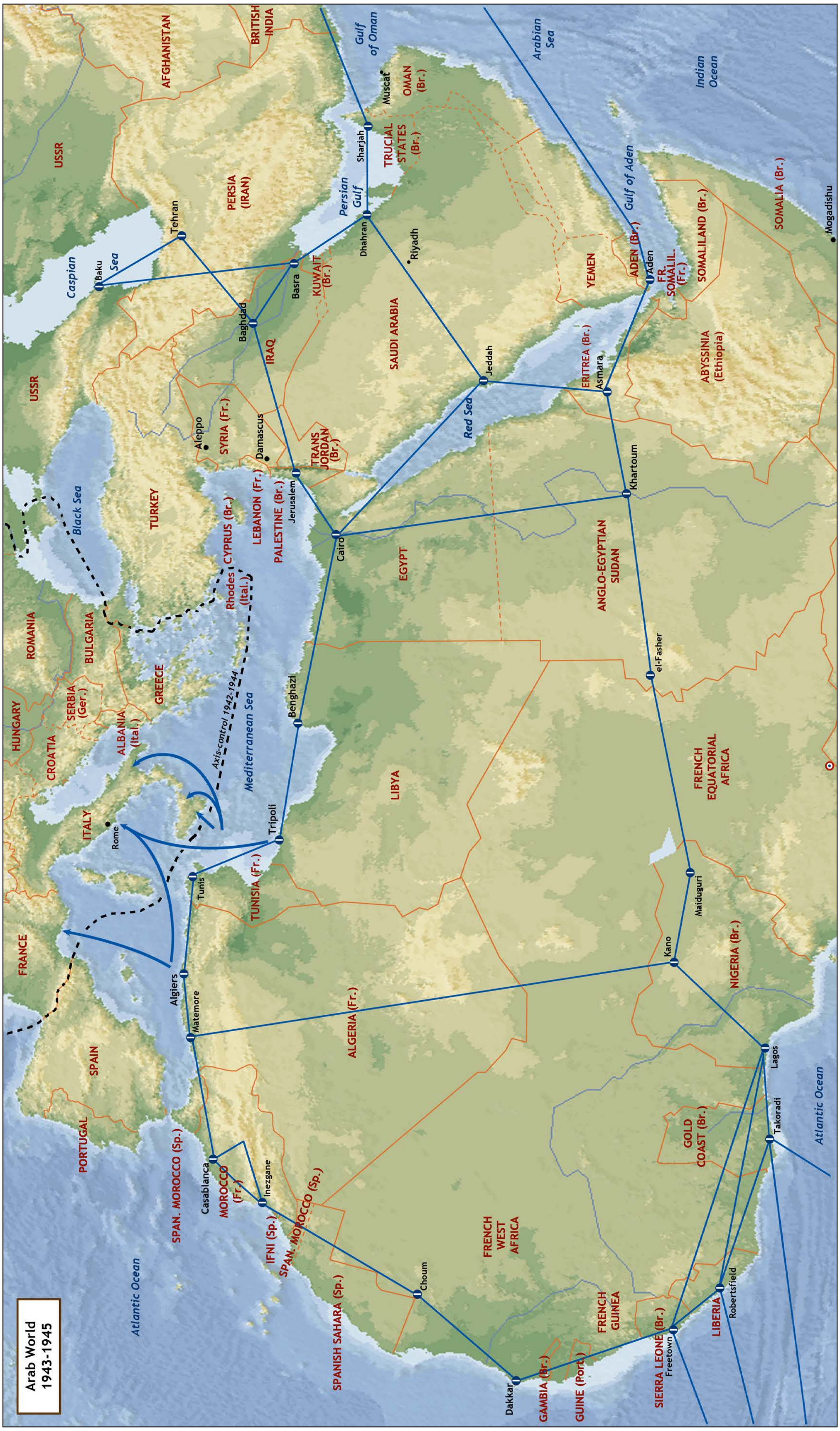
Supermarine Spitfire Mk. Vb or Vc (REAF No. 2 Squadron, 1945). All the Spitfire Mk. Vcs finally sold to Egypt in February 1945, and delivered starting with February that year, were second-hand aircraft: indeed, many were worn out or even damaged and had to be completely rebuilt. When this process was complete and prior to their delivery to the REAF, all received a fresh coat of the RAF Day Fighter Temperate camouflage pattern, either in Ocean Grey (BS381C/640) or Extra Dark Sea Grey (BS381C/641) and Dark Green (BS381C/241) on upper surfaces and sides. Undersurfaces were painted either in Sky Blue (BS381C/101, as illustrated here, because it was the most common), Sky Type S (BS381C/210), or Eau-De-Nil (BS381C/216) — probably depending on availability. Contrary to the practices in the Supermarine factory, and others in the UK, which frequently used white, the fuselage band and the spinner were both painted in the same colour as the undersurfaces, in accordance with RAF regulations introduced in 1942. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



Supermarine Spitfire Mk. Vb or Vc (REAF No. 2 Squadron, 1945). While they might have retained their RAF-serials until the time of delivery, the Egyptians subsequently kept only the two prefix letters, while replacing numerals with those from their own sequence. The Spitfire Vb or Vc illustrated at the top of the page thus became 'ER602', which bore no relation to the original ER602 (which was struck off charge in late 1942). Similar was true for the example directly above, which might have been JK195, JK371, JK648, JK722, JK728, JK834, JK968, or JK984 while operated by RAF, but in REAF service received the serial JK612. Egyptian Spitfires were intensively flown, and all began showing signs of wear in a matter of days after their delivery, in February–March 1945. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



Supermarine Spitfire Mk. Vb or Vc (REAF, No. 2 Squadron, 1945). Another early Egyptian Spitfire Vc (Tropical) was this this example, unique in having six engine exhausts. Sadly, both the ex-RAF, and the REAF serials of this aircraft remain unknown; the former was crudely removed short of delivery and replaced by an Egyptian serial in the 600-upwards sequence. In common with the Egyptian practice of assigning single code-letters, as introduced on Hurricanes, most REAF Spitfire Mk. Vs wore large codes applied in white on their rear fuselage. Notably, the spare rudder appears to have been from another aircraft, which explains the unusual flow of the camouflage pattern on it. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)


Arab World 1943-1945
Atlantic Ocean
PORTUGAL
SPAIN
FRANCE
ITALY
Rome
CROATIA
HUNGARY
SERBIA (Ger.)
ALBANIA (Ital.)
ROMANIA
BULGARIA
GREECE
USSR
TURKEY
Black Sea
Caspian Sea
Baku
Tehran
PERSIA (IRAN)
AFGHANISTAN
BRITISH INDIA
Mediterranean Sea
Axis-control 1942-1944
Rhodes (Ital.)
CYPRUS (Br.)
SYRIA (Fr.)
Aleppo
Damascus
LEBANON (Fr.)
PALESTINE (Br.)
Jerusalem
TRANS JORDAN (Br.)
IRAQ
Baghdad
Basra
KUWAIT (Br.)
Persian Gulf
Dhahran
Sharjah
TRUCIAL STATES (Br.)
Muscat
OMAN (Br.)
Gulf of Oman
Arabian Sea
Indian Ocean
SAUDI ARABIA
Riyadh
Jeddah
Red Sea
YEMEN
ADEN (Br.)
Aden
Gulf of Aden
FR. SOMALIL. (Fr.)
SOMALILAND (Br.)
SOMALIA (Br.)
Mogadishu
ERITREA (Br.)
Asmara
ABYSSINIA (Ethiopia)
Cairo
EGYPT
Khartoum
ANGLO-EGYPTIAN SUDAN
el-Fasher
FRENCH EQUATORIAL AFRICA
Benghazi
LIBYA
Tripoli
TUNISIA (Fr.)
Tunis
Algiers
Matemore
ALGERIA (Fr.)
SPAN. MOROCCO (Sp.)
Casablanca
MOROCCO (Fr.)
Inezgane
IFNI (Sp.)
SPAN. MOROCCO (Sp.)
SPANISH SAHARA (Sp.)
Choum
FRENCH WEST AFRICA
Dakkar
GAMBIA (Br.)
GUINE (Port.)
FRENCH GUINEA
SIERRA LEONE (Br.)
Freetown
LIBERIA
Robertsfield
GOLD COAST (Br.)
Takoradi
Lagos
NIGERIA (Br.)
Kano
Maiduguri
Atlantic Ocean

A map of the Arab world as of 1943–1945, showing the main routes used by Allied services to transfer aircraft around North Africa and the Middle East, approximate Axis control over southern Europe, and the directions of major Allied offensives in the 1943–1944 period. (Map by Tom Cooper)

The last two years of the Second World War saw the affairs of the REAF and the Egyptian Army continuing to be dominated by a quarrel between King Faruq and his elected governments, between a Palace clique deeply resentful of the high-handed way it had been treated by the British back in 1942 and governments which were doing as much as they could to support the Allied cause. Underlying this was what can only be described as the feud between the King and the Wafd Party leader Mustafa Nahas Pasha. For the Egyptian armed forces, the most disruptive, and perhaps more irritating, thing was the way in which King Faruq continually interfered with senior military appointments and promotions.

In June 1944 Prince Isma'il Da'ud, the one-time commander of the Egyptian Army's elite South-western Force and undoubtedly a supporter of the Allied cause, warned the British Embassy that he feared what he called an Arabi-style military coup. How much credence the British gave to this is unknown, but it would be fair to say that British political and military pressure on King Faruq only eased off after the war moved from North Africa to the European mainland. Meanwhile, Hasanain Pasha had played the role of a discrete intermediary between the British Embassy and the Royal Palace since the crisis of 1942, and was still doing so late in 1944. He let King Faruq know – unofficially – that the British would not actively intervene if the King dismissed the pro-British Director of the Egyptian security services, though they would complain vocally. This event came at a time when King Faruq's prestige amongst his own people, including the armed forces, was once again on the rise, and the British did not want to cause unnecessary problems when their hands were full elsewhere.

In 1944 the British were afraid that the success of the Communist-dominated Greek resistance movements against the Germans, which eventually controlled virtually the entire country except for the main towns and roads, would inspire comparable armed resistance against the British in Egypt, especially as there was such a large and influential Greek community in Egypt, most notably in Alexandria. So, General Henry Maitland Wilson, the Commander in Chief Middle East, requested military reinforcements. Few were available; consequently Wilson and his colleagues had to continue relying upon the Egyptian Army for internal security.

There was also a growing disparity between British behaviour in Egypt and Britain's sponsoring of a Lebanese government-in-exile in May 1944. The British were already afraid that some Arab countries, including those under British or French control, would withdraw their support for the Allied cause. This was caused by continuing interference in Arab affairs and by rising Arab concern about the future of Palestine where tensions between the indigenous Palestinian Arab population and the Zionist Jewish settler community had never gone away. The British were once again caught in the middle, as they had been during the 1920s and 1930s. Then, on 6 November 1944, Lord Moyne the British Secretary of State for the Colonies and Leader of the House of Lords, was murdered by Eliyahu Bet-Zuri and Eliyahu Hakim, two Zionist extremists from the Lehi group, otherwise known as the Stern Gang. In fact, Lord Moyne's support for the partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states differed from the great majority of British civil and military officials who still opposed the creation of a Jewish state at the expense of the majority Arab population. On the other hand, Moyne opposed a Zionist takeover of all Palestine and had been accused of not doing enough to help European Jews during the worst period the Holocaust. For those reasons, and for his position as a figurehead of the British colonial and imperial establishment, Lord Moyne was a target for the Stern Gang.

As for the Egyptian Army, the Arab Legion units of the Frontier Forces were disbanded and the Observer Corps which had so long manned the air observation line across the Western Desert was absorbed into the Camel Corps. The Mobile Force had already been disbanded and Prince Isma'il Da'ud was now in command of a rather less exciting, and not entirely successful, anti-malarial campaign in Upper Egypt. Meanwhile, the Frontier Brigade's zone of responsibility was extended to include the Capuzzo area of Libya, thus becoming one of only two Egyptian units to serve outside Egypt or the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. The other was an outpost established at Kufra oasis inside south-eastern Libya in 1942. At Capuzzo Egyptian troops were also tasked with gathering military material which lay abandoned in the desert.

Within a few months of the new Egyptian government's declaration of war on 24 February 1945 Egyptian troops were given the responsibility of guarding thousands of German and Italian prisoners of war currently held in Egypt. Furthermore, the anti-aircraft units had acquired a larger number of heavy guns. The Egyptian anti-aircraft units had not been attacked since the end of the North African Campaign, but they had engaged enemy reconnaissance aeroplanes over Alexandria and Port Sa'id. As a result, the anti-aircraft units along the Suez Canal were strengthened. The Egyptian Army also hoped that some of its men would be trained by the British in the use of radar, though as yet there had been no British response to such a request.

Generally speaking, discipline, which had been hit by the political situation and by an acute shortage of vehicles which made it difficult for Egyptian formations to cooperate with British ones, was best in those units with active tasks. It was worse in those without anything obviously important to do. In fact, a report by the British Advisory Mission in August 1943 made rather depressing reading, noting that the problem of men and even officers stealing British stores for sale on the black market had become serious. Some of this thieving was actually done for political purposes, with a small number of highly nationalist Egyptian officers having organised an underground network whereby stolen British munitions were stored for future use – sometimes eventually against the British themselves. In November 1944, Anwar Sadat also escaped from his prison outside al-Minya.

Another rather shady organisation in Egypt at this time was the Iron Guard. Perhaps named after a regiment of armoured cavalry in the mid-nineteenth century Egyptian Army, it had been formed in the early 1930s as a supposedly secret royalist political movement, subsequently used by King Faruq as a weapon in his personal and political vendettas. Its membership largely consisted of Army officers and it was connected with several secret military groups. In fact, one of its most prominent men, Yusuf Rashad, recruited Anwar Sadat at some time during the later years of the Second World War. Other members included Mrs Nahid Rashad who was widely regarded as King Faruq's lover, and Muhammad Ibrahim Kamil. Amongst the senior military officers in the Iron Guard were General Hussain Sirry Amir and Captain Mustafa Kamil Sidqi. Operating with "a license to kill", the Iron Guard is said to have received its orders from the King Faruq in person. Apart from protecting the King, it eventually served as something akin to the British Special Operations Executive, gathering military intelligence. After the Second World War the Iron Guard came out into the open, especially during the Palestine War of 1948 when some members of the Egyptian royal family were associated with it, even including the King's young sister, Princess Faiza.

Against such a background the REAF continued its rehabilitation and strengthening throughout 1944. According to the Advisory

Mission's Report of February that year, there had been considerably improvement in morale and discipline, largely as a result of the arrival of modern aeroplanes and more flying time. New equipment now enabled the REAF to cooperate effectively with the RAF, as it had done much earlier during the Second World War. The only accident had, in fact, been on the ground when a pilot used his aeroplane's brakes incorrectly. Sadly, the lack of accidents in the REAF would change after it was given a more active role during 1944, the second half of that year seeing six fatalities, three of which were during operational flights. Meanwhile, the REAF ferry pilots were already doing well. Nevertheless, the big questions hanging over the REAF's future role remained largely unanswered.

The upgrading of the REAF's equipment during the year would be dramatic, though it could be seen as a move from obsolete to obsolescent aircraft. It would be many years before the REAF acquired anything which could genuinely be described as modern. Nevertheless, No. 1 Squadron's Hurricanes proved a significant success while No. 2 Squadron earned welcome praise from the British RAF and British Army. Indeed No 2. Squadron was credited with reaching the operational standards of an RAF unit which, given the RAF's years of intense combat experienced since 1939, was no small praise. No. 3 Squadron acquired an albeit small number of Avro Ansons which considerably enhanced its capabilities, while No. 4 Squadron's Ansons enabled this unit to be more effective in combatting smuggling. On the negative side, Egypt's continuing failure to persuade the British to release De Havilland Mosquitos was a continuing source of frustration. Improvements in training aircraft were sometimes more apparent than real, and remained a continuing source of frustration. The Harvards were certainly welcome but the Miles Masters, originally destined for Turkey but diverted to the REAF, proved unsuitable for Egypt's desiccated climate.

There was now clearly greater sympathy for the Allied cause amongst the REAF's personnel, though it might be truer to say that the unsympathetic or subversive minority had shrunk and those who remained anti-British kept a lower profile. Belief in an approaching Allied victory enabled politically active Egyptians to look forward to a brighter post-war era when the unwelcome and oppressive British presence might be removed by political means rather than ineffective acts of sabotage. At the same time substantial numbers of REAF aircrew and other personnel eagerly volunteered for duties directly involved in the Allied war effort under British command. This also suited the Egyptian government and higher military commands, which were eager to expand the REAF in terms of capabilities as well as personnel and equipment.

In this respect the employment of REAF pilots by the RAF No. 216 Transport and Ferry Group gave such men wide ranging experience of many different aircraft types and of working far from their own country. Similarly, the placing of the REAF's No. 2 Squadron under the RAF's No. 219 Group showed both sides that close cooperation was possible and useful. In contrast No. 6 Squadron's frustrating experience with its unreliable P-40 Tomahawks, despite British technical support, resulted in this unit stopping flying in the middle of 1944 after training flights proved too dangerous.

Some have argued that the Egyptian government's eagerness to please the British from 1942 to 1944 harmed the REAF's longer term development, and that in some respects this help was more than was actually required by the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936. On the other hand, the REAF's contribution to the Allied war effort was real and appreciated, at least by senior British and other Allied officers in the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean theatres. Such enthusiastic cooperation may have resulted, to a significant degree, from Prime Minister Nahas Pasha's political need, during his fourth term in office (6 February 1942 to 10 October 1944) to retain British support during his ongoing quarrel with King Faruq and the so-called "Palace clique".

Nahas hoped for a reward in terms of Egypt's voice being heard after the war, and in a positive British response to Egyptian demands once the war was over. Egypt's voice would indeed be heard, but as far as a sympathetic reaction from the British was concerned the Egyptians would, as had happened back in 1919, be disappointed. By then King Faruq had removed Mustafa Nahas from the Egyptian premiership, replacing him with Ahmad Mahir Pasha (10 October 1944 to 24 February 1945). Nahas Pasha had also managed to alienate a small but radical element within the Egyptian officer corps, including some in the REAF, by what was seen by many as his unduly ruthless purge following the crisis of 1942. On the other hand, Prime Minister Ahmad Mahir continued, and indeed strengthened, his predecessor's policy of support for the Allied war effort, though his proscription of the influential Muslim Brotherhood would alienate others in the Egyptian military and in wider Egyptian society. Indeed, it would result in his own assassination. Egyptian politics were entering a volatile period which would continue for at least a decade.

Seen from a British perspective, the start of 1944 had not only seen the REAF back in a position to cooperate actively with the RAF but saw the British again eager for the Egyptians to do just that. Even so, when viewed with hindsight, some British reports read with a certain irony. In February 1944, for example, the Chief of the Advisory Mission reported on the REAF's uncertainty as to its future role, and suggested that; "It appears that, whereas Egypt can look forward to a time when there will be no very strong enemy within reach by land, there will always be an air threat to be taken into consideration". The British Foreign Secretary added some months later that; "It is clear that under the guidance of the British Advisory Mission, the Royal Egyptian Air Force have now begun to make a necessarily small but nevertheless direct contribution to the Allied war effort". The writer was none other than Anthony Eden who, as British Prime Minister in 1956 would earn notoriety as a result of the Suez War.

In 1944 the future role of REAF was seen by the British primarily as local defence, including the protection of airfields in Egypt. More immediately, however, a serious outbreak of malaria in Upper Egypt from January to April 1944 meant that part of the REAF was committed to spraying DDT, as well as supporting Egyptian Army units under Prince Isma'il Da'ud in an effort to combat the spread of the disease. Some Avro 626s are known to have had the required "dusting" equipment added beneath their wings. This outbreak of malaria nevertheless resulted in around 100,000 deaths.

Such operations were well within the REAF's capabilities, but the REAF's problems at the staff level remained. The British continued to complain that the REAF was so weak in this regard that effective administration was almost impossible – clearly an exaggeration – though the situation was expected to improve when REAF officers sent on courses at the British Middle East Staff College in Haifa returned to Egypt. One of those who returned was Ibrahim Gazerine, but rather than being settled into the upper echelons of the REAF, he was sent to the USA in 1944 as part of an unrealistically optimistic attempt to purchase American aircraft for the REAF. On returning from America, Gazerine became the Technical Secretary to the Egyptian Under Secretary for War and eventually rose to the rank of *Qa'id Firqah Jawwiyah* (Air Commodore). Meanwhile the main problem stemmed from the fact that the REAF's Director, the

Army officer *Liwa* Husni Tahir Pasha, was reluctant to make changes whereas the most senior REAF officers were more forward thinking. On 8 November 1944 Husni Tahir retired but was again replaced by an Army officer, *Liwa* Mitwalli Pasha whom the British Advisory Mission initially feared was too easy going. He would remain at Director of the REAF until 1947.

The Egyptian government had decided to give priority to two of the REAF's fighter squadrons at the expense of other units. All three of the fighter squadrons, Nos. 2, 5 and 17, appear to have been formed into a Fighter Wing, either in late 1943 or 1944, under the command of Ibrahim Hakki who may by then have had had the rank of *Qa'id Janah* (Wing Commander). Not surprisingly, given Hakki's previous supposedly "anti-British" attitude, the Advisory Mission took a close interest in him, including Hakki in a report on the careers of some senior REAF officers in September 1946. This noted that, in addition to being promoted so that he could lead the new Fighter Wing, Ibrahim Hakki became the REAF's senior training officer around 1945. Whatever reservations the British might have had about Hakki's political and undoubtedly nationalistic views, the Advisory Mission reported in February 1944 that the REAF's Fighter Wing was now "progressing tremendously". This report also noted that the REAF had recently established an Aircraft Depot at Almaza, rather surprisingly not having had one here before.

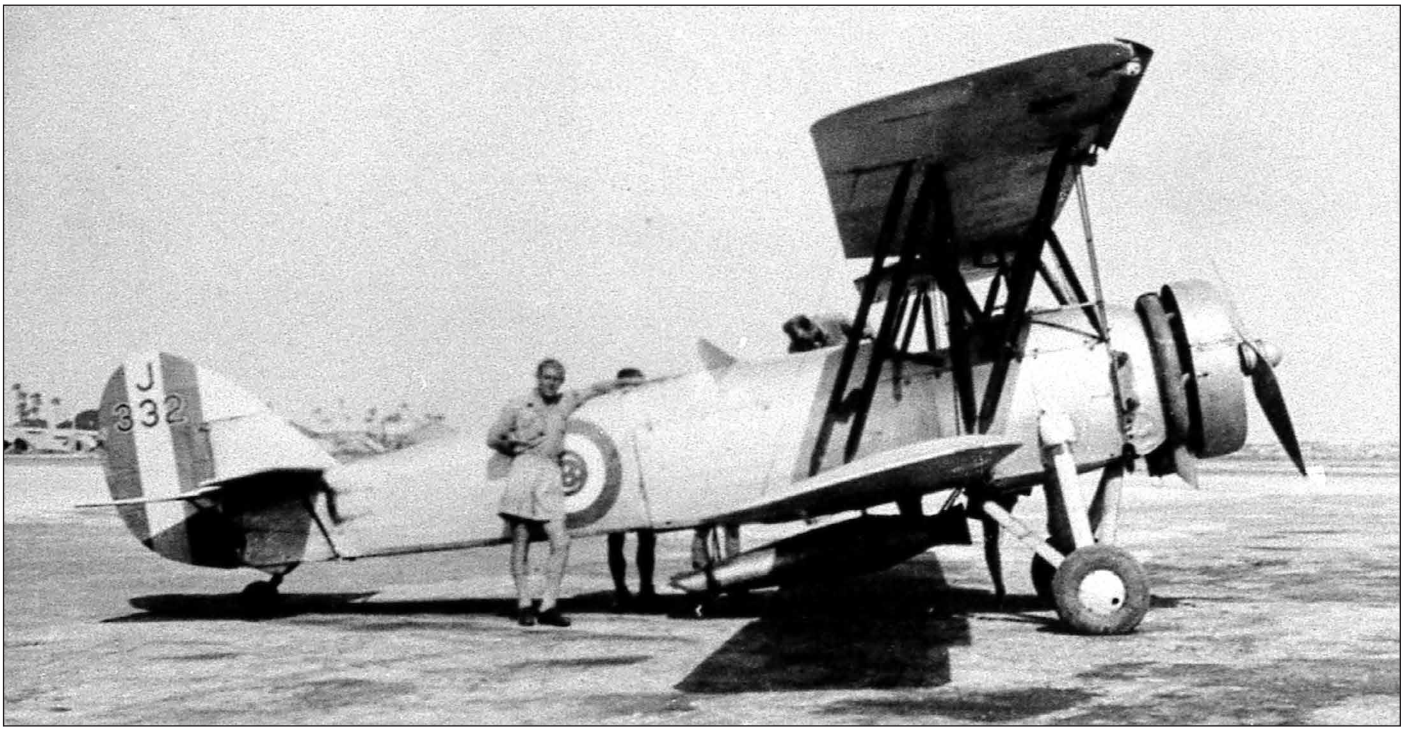
By August 1944 the REAF had a strength of 125 officer pilots, 30 warrant officer pilots and 49 warrant officer air gunners. Meanwhile the process of getting more aeroplanes was complicated by financial matters. There was already an established precedent of Britain lending aeroplanes to Egypt when REAF took over RAF duties, but the British Treasury baulked at the idea of replacing any losses free of charge. So, according to the Advisory Mission's Report of November 1944, the British were trying to get the Egyptians to return to a previous system whereby the latter paid for everything they received. This would come to a head with the question of King Faruq's Royal Avro Anson.

The nominal strength of the REAF was now six operational squadrons, two with Hurricanes, one with Tomahawks, one still with Gladiators and two with Ansons. During the course of 1944, Britain had supplied nine Avro Anson Mk. Is, 12 Hawker Hurricane Mk. IICs on loan, and one Anson 12 "as a gift". In fact, the latter was almost certainly the Avro Anson 19 given to King Faruq as part of his Royal Flight, rather than being a solitary Anson 12 upgraded version of the Mk. I.

For the REAF, the Hurricanes were the most significant of these British machines. By January 1944 the RAF had agreed to lend the Egyptians a complete second squadron of Hurricanes, largely because the RAF was so pleased with the cooperation and support it had received from the REAF's first Hurricane squadron which had carried out tactical reconnaissance under direct RAF control. The second Hurricane squadron was to be used for shipping protection, partly to maintain morale by giving its personnel a proper job to do. The British now agreed to replace any resulting losses, but unfortunately RAF Middle East Command made these arrangements without fully consulting with the British Air Ministry.

To train new pilots to fly Hurricanes, rather than relying solely on giving further training to existing Gladiator and Tomahawk pilots, the REAF needed its own North American T-6 Harvard advanced trainers. On 1 March 1944 (not on 1 April as sometimes stated) an ex-RAF Harvard (serial number EX156) was formally transferred to the REAF. This machine had already been flown by Hassan Tawfiq at Almaza on 23 February, which suggests that it and perhaps some other Harvards were already being used by the REAF Flying Training School before they officially became Egyptian property. Another REAF Harvard which appear in Abu Zaid's logbook in April 1944 was identified as AD, which were identification code letters rather than a serial number. This machine was attached to No. 17, presumably as a hack or for continuing training purposes. It was not a Flying Training School machine.

Then came the Miles Masters advanced trainers, which proved to be as disappointing and as demoralising as the Tomahawks had



Some REAF Avro 626s which were not apparently part of the FTS. This included the serial number J332 seen here, equipped for DDT spraying in the early part of 1944 as part of the Air Force's contribution to a campaign to combat an outbreak of malaria in the south of the country. A duster or dispenser is visible beneath the aeroplane's fuselage. (S.M. Coates photograph) been. By August 1944 the British Air Ministry at last agreed that 25 Miles M. 19 Masters IIs, originally intended for the Turkish Air Force, should go instead to the REAF. Those eventually passed to the Egyptians included ex-RAF serial numbers DL251, DL 252, DL 271, DL 275, DL 276, DL 278, DL 279, DL 280, DL976-DL979, DM166-DM168, DM170, DM173, DM180, DM227 and DM232-DM235. The REAF had hoped to restore its broken training schedules by using these machines, but the Masters rapidly showed themselves to be unsuitable for Egypt's ultra-dry climate.

Nevertheless, the REAF's Flying Training School kept them flying for some time, a feat described as "a great credit to the maintenance personnel" by the British Advisory Mission. Ibrahim Gazerine told the author that the Masters developed such severe wing cracks that they were soon returned to the RAF. However, this time Gazerine's memory played him false, as some of these machines continued to be used until 1947, the following Masters being recorded as scrap at Heliopolis on 23 January 1947, still bearing their ex-RAF serial numbers: DL251, DL252, DL272, DL275, DL276, DL278, DL280, DL976, DL979, DL983, DM167, DM168, DM170, DM173, DM179, DM227, DM232, DM234 and DM235. Of these DL272, DL983 and DM179 had not appeared in the original list of Masters transferred to the REAF, which makes a total of 26 known examples whereas only 25 aircraft had originally been supplied. However, DL271 is known to have been written off in 1945, so the additional Miles Master was presumably a replacement supplied by the RAF. Perhaps it was DL983 as this was one of the three "extra" numbers found amongst the scrap aeroplanes in 1947. It is also not in sequence with any of the other serial number. A photograph of REAF pilot cadet Mustafa Wigdan Fadil standing in front of a Miles Master in very late 1947 or early 1948 also suggests that some may have still been considered airworthy or were being used for ground instruction. However, Fadil's logbook indicates that he never flew in a Miles Master.

Most of the REAF's original Avro Ansons had survived the early war years, despite a number of forced landings. Group Captain Johnny Chick of the Advisory Mission later reported that Egypt had purchased a further nine Ansons between September and December 1944, originally intending that they be used to cooperate with the Army's Frontiers Brigade. Most or perhaps all of these aeroplanes proved to have parts missing and to be severely corroded. In addition, five Avro Anson 19s were sent to Egypt for the country's airline, Misrair, plus one for the Royal Flight. The latter would cause no end of difficulties and was not popular with King Faruq himself.

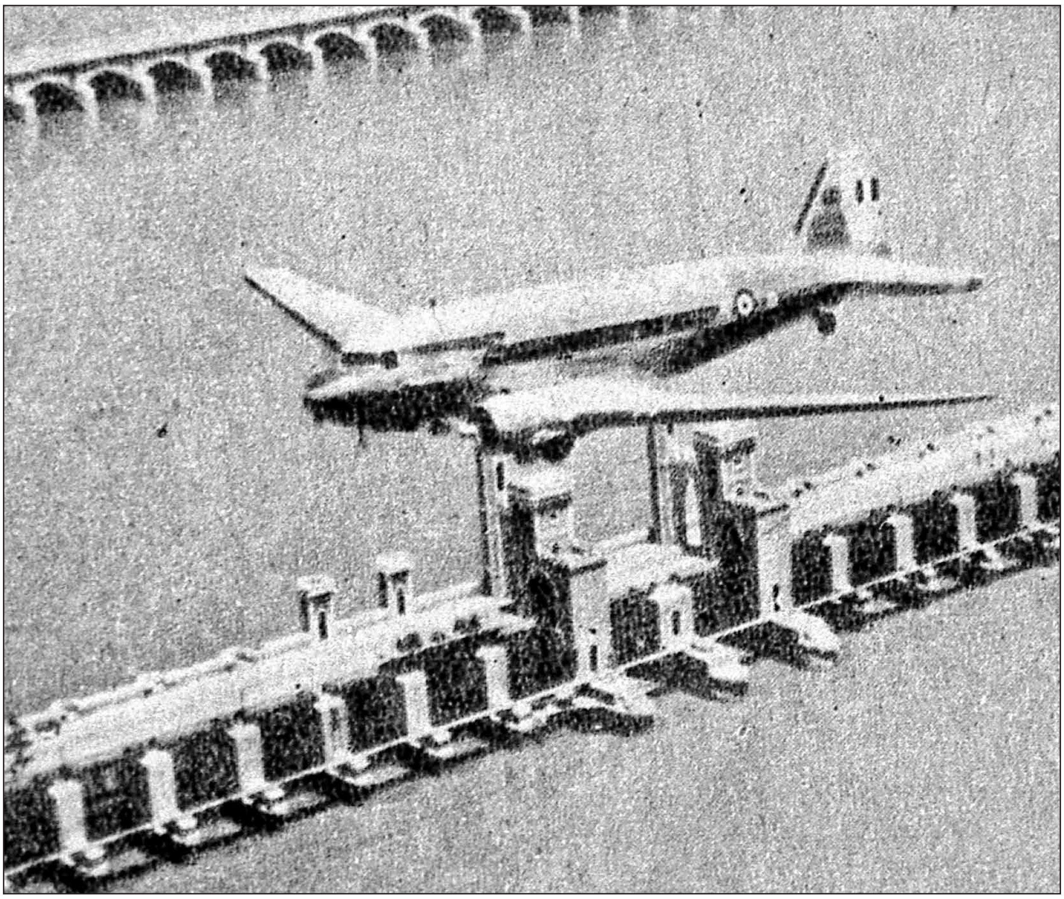
When the Iraqi government learned that the British had given King Faruq this aeroplane, they were incensed because their Regent, Prince Abd al-Ilah, had been obliged to pay £10,000 for his Anson plus a spare engine. British officials in Baghdad promptly passed on their concern to London, while the British Embassy in Cairo found itself in the dark for a while, not knowing for certain whether Faruq's Anson 19 was a gift or not. This was politically important and a flurry of Foreign Office correspondence ensued from 12 December 1944 until 24 January 1945, when it was finally decided that the Egyptian monarch's Anson was a gift after all.

King Faruq's aeroplane was accompanied by an official letter from the British Government to the Egyptian Prime Minister thanking the REAF for the help it had given during the Second World War. The official handover of this highly political Anson was on the King's birthday, during his visit to a REAF base. Here Air Marshal Sir Keith Park presented the Anson 19 as a present from the RAF and said that the British air force was "proud of its younger brother who had made great strides thanks to the personal interest of the King". Quite what the REAF officers present at the ceremony made of this patronising speech is unrecorded. The Royal Flight Anson 19 was, in fact, the first aeroplane to be specially and indeed luxuriously furnished for the Egyptian King. Earlier aeroplanes such as the Percival Q6s merely formed part of No. 3 Squadron's VIP Flight, which had not been officially designated as a Royal Flight.

King Faruq of Egypt accepts the gift of a specially prepared VIP Avro Anson 19 from Air Marshal Sir Keith Park in 1945, a machine which he clearly despised as far inferior to the Douglas Dakota which the American government gave him shortly afterwards. Park's patronising description of the Egyptian Air Force as the RAF's "younger brother who had made great strides" perhaps did not help. (Nour Bardai collection)

According to an official letter he wrote in 1946, Group Captain Chick confirmed that the Curtis Tomahawks supplied to the REAF during the Second World War had been ex-RAF Operational Training Unit machines, and they had gone on to cause numerous accidents. The first reached the REAF on 6 April 1943 and had initially enabled Egyptian fighter pilots to get a lot of training on a powerful and relatively modern fighter. Following technical problems, which Chick stated were due to a fault in their generator drives, the Tomahawks were returned to the RAF in August 1944. Other sources state that No. 17's Tomahawks were "returned to salvage" in November that year. This unfortunate experience had not, however, stopped the Egyptian government from hoping to obtain further American military aircraft. *Qa'id Janah* (Wing Commander) Hassan Aqif, King Faruq's personal pilot, and Ibrahim Gazerine had both formed part of a REAF technical team which visited the USA early in 1944 to investigate a possible purchase of American equipment. A follow-up meeting between a representative of the Curtiss-Wright Corporation and the REAF's new Director late in 1944 revived British fears that Britain might lose a captive market for its military hardware.

Somewhat more straightforward, but also very much delayed, was the REAF's acquisition of Supermarine Spitfire fighters.



The Douglas C-47 Dakota of the REAF's Royal Flight photographed over the old Muhammad Ali Barrage, currently used only as a road bridge. Behind is the newer Nile Barrage completed in 1939. (EAF Museum photograph)

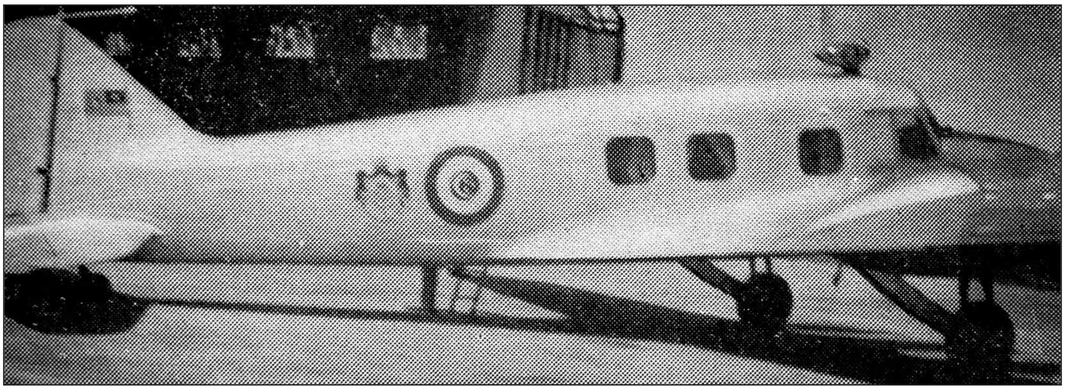
Although none of these aeroplanes were sold to Egypt until after the Second World War, a significant number of Spitfire Mk. Vb/c tropicalised versions were loaned by RAF Middle East Command in 1944 and 1945.

In contrast, the REAF's more ambitious attempts to obtain De Havilland Mosquito high-speed bombers and even more advanced Hawker Sea Fury fighters were blocked, supposedly because of the RAF's unwillingness to release such aeroplanes, but in reality because the British Government would not countenance Egypt having such powerful warplanes. In fact, the first Fury prototype to fly was serial number NX798, which was taken up by one of Hawker's chief test pilots, P.G. Lewis, on 1 September 1944. On this occasion it was powered by a Bristol Centaurus XII engine which was later replaced by a Centaurus XVIII. This superb aeroplane, which represented the pinnacle of piston-engine fighter design, would later be commandeered by the Egyptian authorities and would play a significant role during the Palestine War.

In February 1944 the British at last allowed the REAF's Flying Training Squadron to admit a new course of 22 students; no new pilots having joined the Egyptian squadrons for almost two years. Such was the urgent need in the ranks of the REAF's pool of pilots that some cadets in the Egyptian Military College had been transferred to the Air Force even before this new flying course was arranged. From then on, the FTS at Almaza was one of the busiest units in the REAF. One of the officers reportedly commissioned in 1943 was Mustafa Kamal Abd al-Wahab who then joined this new cohort of flying cadets. However, he was described as a *Qa'id Asrab* (Squadron Leader) in a list of the fallen from the Palestine War, having been killed in action on 31 December 1948. It seems unlikely that he could have reached this rank through the normal process of promotion, so perhaps Mustafa Kamal Abd al-Wahab was posthumously promoted from *Qa'id Sirb* (Flight Lieutenant) to *Qa'id Asrab* (Squadron Leader) to increase the pension given his dependents.

The FTS was, meanwhile, having ongoing problems with its second-hand and sometimes archaic equipment. For example, the old Hart Trainers had been replaced by Miles Masters which formed an intermediate squadron at the FTS, but the problems with their wooden construction became increasingly obvious as the year progressed. On the other hand, all the REAF's flying instructors had now qualified at the RAF Central Flying School. According to the Advisory Mission Report of February 1944, 22 cadets had been selected from 150 applicants, and were now under preliminary training. An Air Company was also to be created at Egypt's Royal Military College, for those youngsters selected for the REAF. Once they arrived at the FTS, the students found themselves sent off to the nearby airfield at al-Khanka where ab initio training on Magisters was undertaken.

At Almaza some pilots from REAF squadrons which were not fighter units had now been selected for fighter training. They did this further training on the available Harvards before being sent to an RAF Operational Training Unit. There was also a revival in ground and technical training while staff and technical officers made their usual refresher flights at Almaza. They included Hassan Tewfik



The Avro Anson 19 of the REAF's Royal Flight does not seem to have been allocated a Royal Flight serial number, perhaps because King Faruq disliked the aeroplane. It was nevertheless used to carry government officials around the Middle East, here photographed at Aleppo in northern Syria in 1946. (Author's collection) who flew Magisters and, on 23 February 1944, a Harvard serial number EX156. Perhaps inevitably, this increased activity resulted in an increased number of accidents. One pilot was killed when his Magister crashed and was written off at al-Khanka. Two Avro 626s were written off in forced landings during bad weather and an "Egyptian" Audax was also written off in a forced landing near Port Sa'id during a sighting exercise with the anti-aircraft artillery.

Despite ab initio training being done at al-Khanka, the increased activity by the REAF contributed to Almaza again becoming dangerously overcrowded. Consequently, in late 1944 RAF Middle East Command wanted some Egyptian units, especially the FTS, to move to Hilwan. However, some in the British political and military hierarchy were afraid that such a request might be misinterpreted by the Egyptians as an attempt to push them out of the aerodrome where the Egyptian Air Force had been born. In fact, the REAF was similarly aware of Almaza's limitations.

One of those military cadets who had long been waiting for their flying training to begin was Mustafa Shallabi al-Hinnawi. He described this period in his unpublished monograph;

> Days went by and the Wafd Party left the government [Nahas Pasha's fourth time of Egypt's Prime Minister ending on 10 October 1944] and the Sa'adin Party came to power with the Wafd Block [the Prime Ministership of Ahmad Mahir Pasha from 10 October 1944 to 24 February 1945]. They refused to accept this cohort [the new cadets] under existing conditions, because it included Zaki Siraj al-Din, the brother of Fu'ad Pasha Siraj al-Din, Hussain and Abd al-Hamid al-Waqil who were brothers of Mrs al-Nahas Pasha, Gamal Attallah the son of Attallah Pasha the current Commander of the Armed Forces [because they feared these young men had been selected for the REAF as a result of political patronage]. So, they insisted that the entire cohort go through another medical examination, but fortunately they all passed the tests carried out by the General Medical Commission, who were civilians. Though the new government was very angry at this result they could not expel any student on the ground of a lack of medical fitness. Instead, they issued an order which transferred the first year in the Military College to the final year of the Military High School [effectively sending a year of cadets back to their previous school]. We were divided into Arts and Sciences and studied the [essentially French] Baccalaureat curriculum. At the end of the year [1944] we were examined according to the system of the Egyptian Ministry of Education, and all received our Baccalaureat degrees. This, however, caused some of the students who had received their [prestigious] Baccalaureate to leave [the armed forces] and join their civilian colleagues at university.

Al-Hinnawi's account sheds light on the political interference which had been, and would remain, the bane of the Egyptian Air Force.

Another prominent REAF pilot who is known to have received his commissions as an officer in 1944, was Sa'ad Sadlq al-Duwayni who would be killed during the tragic Ramat David incident on 25 May 1948. Meanwhile some already qualified REAF pilots and other officers were sent on a variety of RAF courses, including Intelligence, Junior Commanders and Signals.

The first REAF officers to go the RAF Staff College in Haifa had returned, but they were followed by other middle ranking officers including *Qa'id Janah* (Wing Commander) Sidki al-Malaygi and *Qa'id Asrab* (Flight Lieutenant) Umar Shakib, the latter being in Haifa from May to June 1944. Even luckier, perhaps was the second REAF officer to be trained at the prestigious RAF College at Cranwell. This was 22 years old A. Lihata who joined No. 56 Course around May 1944 as an Aircraftsman Second Class. Unfortunately, nothing more is known about his career.

Adli al-Shafa'i in the cockpit of one of the REAF Flying Training School's now aged Miles Magisters while a friend, or perhaps an instructor, points skywards in a typical gesture of Egyptian humour. (Isma'il Elshafei collection)

Competition amongst REAF aircrew for RAF courses within Egypt was equally strong, and the result sometimes surprised the British. For example, one REAF pilot at No 74 OTU passed out second amongst RAF pupils who had been drawn from operational British squadrons. Soon 50 REAF pilots had completed courses at RAF Fighter and Fighter-Recce OTUs. Meanwhile the retraining of those temporarily grounded in the aftermath of the 1942 Crisis continued, amongst whom was Abd al-Hamid Abu Zaid.

The British RAF were also training Iraqi pilots in Egypt around this time. These RIrAF officers had been sent to Egypt to learn to operate Avro Ansons and were consequently sent to the RAF's No. 1 (Middle East) Check and Conversion Unit Egypt which is known to have been in existence from June 1944 to March 1946 (see Chapter Two).

No. 1 (Army Cooperation) Squadron continued much as it had done over the preceding five years of war, under the command of Salih Mahmud Salih, and was regarded as a useful and successful unit by both Egyptians and British. By January 1944, No. 1 Squadron had received several hand-me-down Hurricane Mk. Is from No 17 Squadron, these serving alongside the squadron's remaining serviceable Lysanders. Having already been declared no longer airworthy, these Hurricanes were totally overhauled by REAF

Adli al-Shafa'i probably photographed after he completed his flying training at Almaza. (Ismail Elshafei family archive)

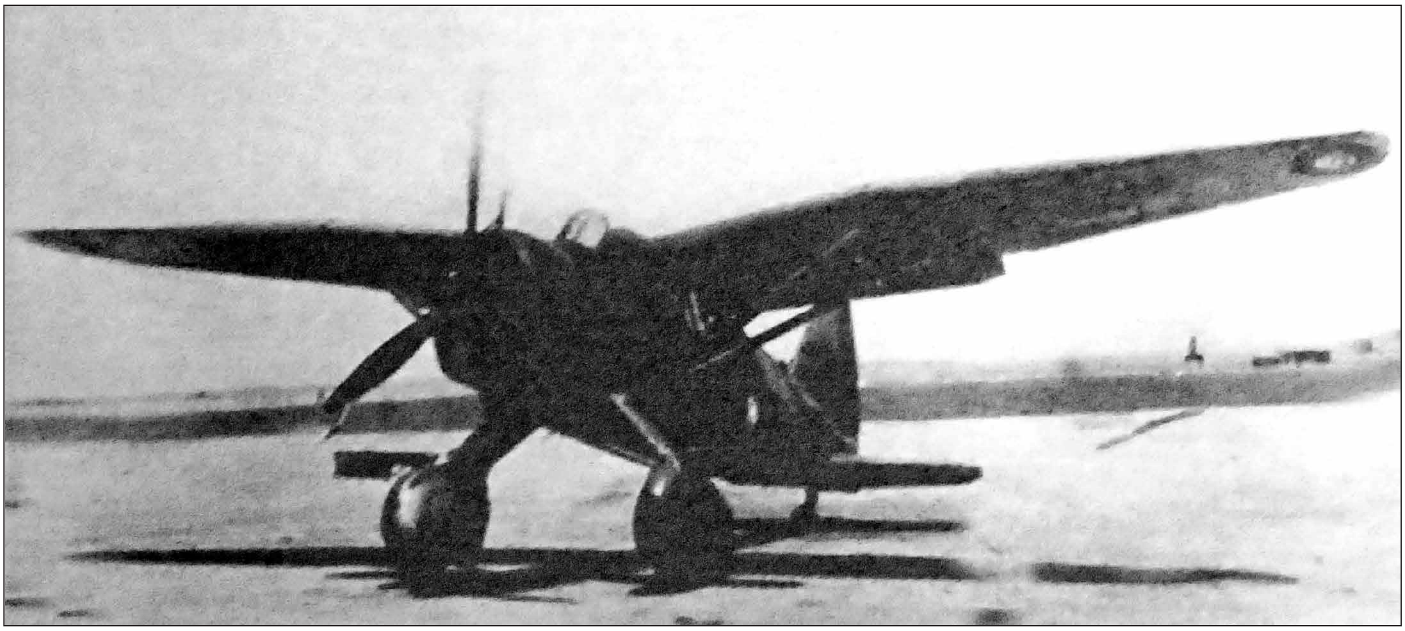
engineers, two also being modified for photo-reconnaissance work with cameras and high-altitude oxygen equipment fitted by REAF engineers in late 1943 or early 1944. Later in the year No. 1 was redesignated as a Photo-Reconnaissance unit and some of its officer were trained by the RAF in photointerpretation. Paradoxically, perhaps, it would be the Lysanders rather than the Hurricanes which were called upon to undertake vital photo-reconnaissance missions in 1948, during the early part of the Palestine War.

January 1944 saw part of No. 1 Squadron take part in Operation Tussle, some of its Hurricanes and Lysanders based at Almaza acting as a third Flight for the RAF's No. 208 Squadron based at Heliopolis. No. 208 Squadron RAF had been based at Megiggo in Palestine prior to this exercise, and according to the squadron Operations Record Book for 9 January 1944; "It is proposed that twelve Spitfires leave for Heliopolis on 14th January, 1944, to take part in Exercise TUSSLE. With this in view the twelve pilots involved are flying Spitfires as much as possible, trying to get as much experience on this type before doing Tac/Rs, Photo/Rs, etc., in real ernest during the scheme".

Two days later Wing Commander Wheeler, Flight Lieutenant Kevill-Davies and Flying Officer Scott travelled overland to Cairo where they would be involved in unspecified ground duties during Exercise Tussle, perhaps in liaison with the REAF's No. 1 Squadron. They were followed by the rest of No. 208 Squadron's "road party" on 12 January, heading for Heliopolis aerodrome under Flight Lieutenant Foster, the squadron's signals officer. According to No. 208 Squadron's Operations Record Book, the party consisted of 120 men including the whole of A Flight and C Flight, in 25 vehicles, and would be followed by the Spitfires themselves which would fly to Egypt on the 14th, ready for the exercise which would start on the 16th. No. 208's B Flight remained in Palestine. In fact, hurricane force winds over southern Palestine delayed the British aeroplanes, but only for a while, and the two Flights of five Spitfires each under Squadron Leader Maslen and Flight Lieutenant Perry left for Egypt. They were followed by another Spitfire and two Hurricanes, one of the latter having to land at al-Firdan near the Suez Canal to refuel.

On the Egyptian side, No. 1 Squadron's mixed force of Lysanders and Hurricanes co-operated with the No. RAF's 208 Squadron, flying as its B Flight during appalling weather in an exercise which pitted "Alexandrians" against "Kabritians". Exercise Tussle took place over the eastern Delta and between Cairo and Suez. It was originally intended to last about a week. On one side the "Alexandrians" with their base area around the Dumyat (Damietta) mouth of the Nile, supposedly wanted to take control of territory and facilities currently held by the "Kabritians" based near Suez. Again according to No. 208 Squadron Operations Record Book, the squadron was involved to the extent of some 15 pilots based at Heliopolis where they were accommodated in the tented camp. Their sorties started on 16 January with a photo-reconnaissance, but the latter proved unsuccessful due to an unserviceable camera. From then on until the end of the exercise on 21 January all types of sorties were constantly flown, despite extremely difficult weather which prevented some of the "opposing air forces" from operating at all. Landing their Spitfires, which were still very new to unit's pilots, on a

Mustafa Shalabi al-Hinnawi (third from left) as a cadet-corporal in the 1st Platoon of the 3rd Company at the Egyptian Army Military School. This was before Hinnawi (standing fifth from left) was selected for service in the REAF, which he eventually rose to command. (Shalabi al-Hinnawi archive)



This Westland Lysander of the REAF has the distinctive variations of Egyptian national markings first used around 1940 or 1941. Some, or perhaps all, of No. 1 Squadron's surviving Lysanders, 14 of which were still on strength in April 1943, were probably re-covered and repainted during the final years of the Second World War because they were suffering from significant fabric deterioration, having stood so long in the open. (EAF Museum collection)

desert aerodrome, frequently in a gusty cross wind, proved a severe test of airmanship. Nevertheless, despite a few anxious moments, there were no "prangs".

Exercise Tussle ended earlier than was anticipated, the umpires having decided that the side for which No. 208 Squadron and its third Flight consisting of No. 1 Squadron REAF, which had confidently expected to win, had not done so. As a result, in the words of No. 208's Operations Record Book, "midday January 21st saw Heliopolis deserted and the Cairo hostels correspondingly swollen". While this Operations Record Book naturally provided a great deal of detailed information about the squadron's own activities, it made only a cursory mention of the REAF, simply stating that;

> In addition to our own sorties, No. 1 Egyptian Air Force (Recce) Squadron flew on our side and their aircraft were refuelled by our flights. In fact, they were acting as a third flight to our Squadron. They flew 29 [28 according to a different source] sorties throughout the scheme, both in Hurricanes and in Lysanders. Thus, the total sorties flown by the "Recce" aircraft at Heliopolis was brought up to one hundred and two by the end of the scheme.

Exercises like Tussle provided good training but also highlighted how adverse weather could hamper operations. For example, 18 sorties were flown on 18 January:

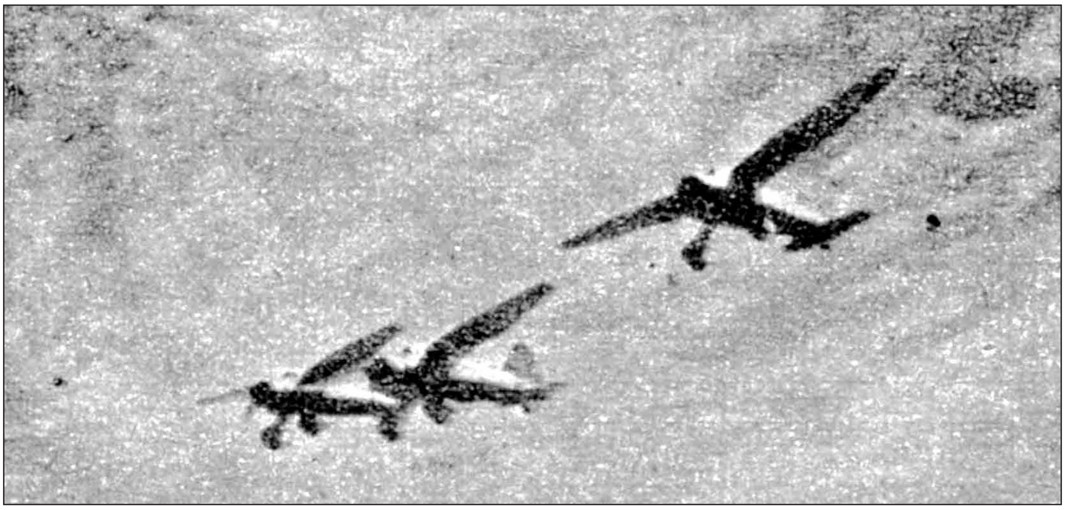
> In addition to the usual T.R. and Photo/R, six aircraft took off in the late afternoon on a Fighter Bomber Mission. The idea was to bomb tanks concealed in the hills west of Suez. This idea emanated from G/Cpt Max Aitkin D.S.O., D.F.C. (and other decorations), A.O.C. "ALEXANDRIANS", who called in the morning from his fighter base in a Spitfire. Unfortunately, the weather was poor with dust and haze much in evidence, and it proved quite impossible to locate the targets from the appropriate height. With dusk rapidly approaching the aircraft were recalled and three of them did Tac/Rs on the way home.

The Max Aitkin in question was the son of Max Aitkin senior, First Baron Beaverbrook, the Canadian-born newspaper publisher and close confidant of Winston Churchill.

After Exercise Tussle concluded, the British Army was so impressed by the accuracy of the pinpointing by No. 208 Squadron RAF and No. 1 Squadron REAF that the airmen were suspected of "fixing" the sorties beforehand, though this had not been the case. In practice the British and Egyptian pilots had experienced no difficult in locating landmarks, and consequently pinpointing proved to be easy in the broken country in the triangle of desert between Cairo, Suez and Dumyat (Damietta). Photographic sorties, both vertical and oblique, had also proved highly successful.

Here it worth noting that some of No. 1 Squadron's Lysanders would be used for exactly the same purposes during the early parts of the Palestine War, four years later. Unfortunately, it is not yet known whether any of the very small number of Egyptian pilots who flew the Lysanders in 1948 had also taken part in Operation Tussle. No. 1 Squadron's senior officers had all attended the RAF's No. 74 OTU in Palestine, an OTU which specialised in training army-cooperation pilots in tactical reconnaissance under desert conditions and which, apart from a brief period in Lebanon, had been based at various airfields in Palestine since October 1941. Paradoxically, at least two of these Palestinian air bases would become targets for the REAF in 1948. Following the joint exercise in January, the British Advisory Mission wrote a glowing report which as usual praised No. 1 Squadron's Commanding Officer but also drew attention to the admirable way his old Lysanders and Hurricane Mk. Is remained serviceable.

After Exercise Tussle, No. 1 Squadron reportedly had 11 Lysanders to continue its traditional roles of supporting the Egyptian Army and carrying out aerial surveys for various Egyptian authorities. Two were sent to Upper Egypt in March to fly anti-drug smuggling patrols, perhaps the most traditional of all the REAF's duties. Meanwhile the squadron's Hurricanes were integrated into the Egyptian Army's new Air Support Control Organisation, two of them being set aside for photo-reconnaissance duties after being fitted with twin cameras and oxygen equipment by REAF workshops. Two officers were also trained by the RAF in photointerpretation and by August



REAF Westland Lysanders in flight. During the latter part of the Second World War one of their primary duties was to assist in the training and calibration of the Egyptian Army's anti-aircraft batteries. (EAF Museum collection)

1944 all of No. 1 Squadron's pilots had attended courses at No. 74 OTU. A month or so later there was considerable excitement in No. 1 Squadron when two of its Lysanders got lost on a flight to Bahariyah Oasis during work with the Egyptian Army. They landed in the desert about 50kms away and a combined RAF and United States Army Air Force (USAAF) search failed to find them. Six days later, however, the crews returned to Cairo, unhurt, riding on camels they had borrowed from the local Bedouin. Their aircraft proved to be undamaged and were soon salvaged.

The year 1944 saw No. 2 Squadron return to its earlier position as the REAF's elite and most experienced unit. Its Commanding Officer was *Qa'id Sirb* (Flight Lieutenant), acting *Qa'id Asrab* (Squadron Leader) Muhammad Hafiz, with *Tayyar Awal* (Flying Officer) acting *Qa'id Sirb* (Flight Lieutenant) Midhat Muhammad Qasdi, the leader of No. 17 Squadron, as his second in command. Qasdi had been seconded to No. 2 Squadron for experience, as were groups of No. 17 Squadron pilots on rotation. The plan was for No. 2 Squadron, plus those No. 17 pilots on secondment, to fly shipping protection patrols and so release the RAF's No. 208 Squadron, which had been trained for these duties, to be sent to the Italian front. Some sources describe No. 208 as carrying out this tedious duty off the coast of Cyrenaica in February 1944, though other records show that none were undertaken, No. 208 being sent from Megiddo in Palestine to Trigno in Italy on 17 March, before its shipping protection patrols began. Instead, the REAF took over responsibility for this duty.

According to a letter from Wing Commander P.F. Rogers, a veteran of No. 208 Squadron, written to the author on 14 July 1974 about No 208 Squadron RAF:

> As to activities in 1944, the Squadron re-equipped with Spitfires at Megiddo in the January of that year. It continued its Army co-operation and reconnaissance work until February 1944 when two flights [A and C Flights] moved to Barsis [the landing ground at Birsis, outside Tukrah (Tocra) in eastern Libya] to carry out the depressing duty of shipping patrols. However, the order was cancelled on arrival at Barsis and the flights returned to Megiddo from whence the whole Squadron moved to Italy in March 1944.

According to No. 208 Squadron's Operations Book; "The L/G. [landing ground] at Barsis, Cyrenaica, was completely unserviceable by weather and likely to remain so for some days", though it went on to state that after several days rain the airfield was "serviceable for reception of air-party" on the 19th. The following day, 20 February, No. 208 Squadron was informed that it would not be flying shipping patrols after all.

In the event the duty of flying shipping protection patrols off the Mediterranean coast of western Egypt fell to No. 2 Squadron REAF. Their primary purpose was to protect convoys sailing between Alexandria and Sollum, two Hurricanes constantly flying around the ships until they passed out of the Egyptians' patrol area. The shipping protection patrols over the Eastern Mediterranean by No. 2 Squadron's Hurricanes were under the control of No. 219 Group RAF, commanded by the AOC Air Defence Eastern Mediterranean. Initially operating from Idku some kilometres east of Alexandria, they later also operated from Marsa Matruh, and were under the command of Muhammad Hafiz whom British records continued to describe as "very competent"; also adding somewhat condescendingly that "the bearing and standard of REAF personnel came as a surprise to the RAF who now welcome their presence".

Muhammad Abd al-Hamid Abu Zaid was one of those No. 17 Squadron pilots who were seconded to No. 2 Squadron to take part in these shipping protection patrols. His available logbook only goes up to 31 August 1944, but information supplied to the author by the EAF Historical Department stated that Abu Zaid was attached to No. 2 Squadron until 25 April 1946. On 22nd, 24th and 29 January 1944, however, Abu Zaid was still as Almaza, where he made three flights in Hurricane LV563. The last of these was "local flying to 7,000 ft" (2,134m) and this page of his logbook was signed off by both Qasdi and Hafiz. The squadron's move to operational status under the control of No. 219 Group was on the same day that Abu Zaid flew "Cross country Almaza to Idku", on 5 February 1944, so perhaps the whole of No. 2 Squadron, plus an attached Flight from No. 17 Squadron, flew Almaza to Edku together on that date.

The Advisory Mission Report for August 1944 stated that No. 2 Squadron, "moved to RAF operational status on 2 February 1944", which was actually a fortnight before the ground party of No. 208 Squadron RAF set off from Megiddo in Palestine for Tukrah in Libya. However, No. 2 Squadron REAF was not fully operational until 1 April. It is perhaps also significant that, from 3 February 1944 onwards, Abu Zaid's logbook shows that the aeroplanes he flew while attached to No. 2 Squadron were identified by a single individual identification letter as well as their serial number. From 11 March onwards only this identification letter is mentioned in his logbook. Fortunately, most of the machines had already been mentioned with both the letter and the serial number, but there are a few which are not.

Another important person for No. 2 Squadron was Squadron Leader N.P. Hancock of the British Advisory Mission who was attached to the squadron for operational training. He was credited with "overcoming the apathy of long stagnation". Until 20 March, the entries in Abu Zaid's logbook suggest that he was still training, rather than taking part in fully operational patrols. How far this applied to the squadron as a whole is unclear, but it probably did not. Abu Zaid was, after all one of the pilots seconded from No. 17

Squadron, whereas the permanent pilots of No. 2 Squadron had already been trained in this task.

Abu Zaid's first flight on secondment to No. 2 Squadron, was on 3 February, in Hurricane LB676 M, while still at Almaza. Then came the flight to Idku in the same aeroplane, taking of at 0930 on 5 February. There was then a pause in flying until 13 February, when Abu Zaid again took up LB676 M at 1050, followed by another flight in this machine the following day at 1200. Over the next eight days he made unspecified but presumably training flights in Hurricanes LB425 K, LB563 S and LB607 L. on the mornings of 20th, 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 25th and 27 February. Later during the 27th, Abu Zaid took off at 1430 in Hurricane LB548 C for what was described as a "Jumper" sortie. It was followed on 28 February by a "Jumper information" flight in Hurricane LB789 F, taking off at 0800 in the morning. This page of the logbook was then signed by *Tayyar Awal* (Flying Officer) Qasdi as CO of No. 17 Squadron, and countersigned by Muhammad Hafiz the CO of No. 2 Squadron. Subsequently Qasdi was identified as the CO of B Flight of No. 2 Squadron, which suggests that he and the other pilots on secondment to No. 2 Squadron may have stuck together as B Flight.

Abu Zaid's logbook shows that he and presumably his colleagues were very active during the first half of March, often making multiple training flights in one day. On the 3rd he took off at 0955 in Hurricane LB741 P. On the 4th he went up in Hurricane LB789 twice, at 0810 and 1400. On the 5th Abu Zaid again flew twice, this time in Hurricane LB831 R at 1655 and 1825, this second flight being specified as "Local landing night flight" which was written in red. On the 7th Abu Zaid only flew once, this time taking off at 1800 with *Dabat Saff* (Warrant Officer) Khalil in Avro 626 whose serial number was written as L311 but should have been J311. This was again specified as "Night flight" and was again written in red. On the 8th and 9 March Abu Zaid took off at 1700 and 1910 respectively in Hurricane LB676 M. On the 11th Abu Zaid was in the air three times, the first being as 0950 in Hurricane R (previously identified as LB831); the second at 1030 again being in Hurricane R (LB831) for "Battle formation low flying over sea"; the third being at 1410 in Hurricane D (serial unknown) for an "Oxygen climb to 3,500 ft" (1,066m). He again had three flights on the 12th, first taking off at 1150 in Hurricane E (serial number unknown) for "Battle formation and interception". The second was at 1710 in Hurricane (this being LB831) for an unspecified flight; the third also being in Hurricane (this being LB831) for "Cross country to Tanta and back, night flight" though this time the night flight was not marked in red.

Abu Zaid then did not fly for seven days, but took to the air twice on 20 March, at 1035 in Hurricane D (serial unknown) for an unspecified mission, and at 1225 in Hurricane F (which was LB789) on a "Readiness patrol". Flights on the 21st in Hurricane F (being LB789) at 0650 and on the 23rd in Hurricane D (serial number unknown) for "Air to ground firing", were followed by two flights on the 24th, both in Hurricane M (being LB676) at 1540 for a "Patrol", and at 1815 for a "Patrol over sea night flight". His only flight on 25 February was at 0545 in Hurricane M (being LB676) for a "Patrol". His two flights on the 26th were both for "Convoy escort", taking off at 0655 in Hurricane G (serial number unknown but possible LB927) and at 0915 in Hurricane D (serial number unknown). Abu Zaid's last flight in March was on the 30th, taking off at an unspecified time in an unspecified Hurricane for "Oxygen climb and jettisoning tanks". This page of his logbook was signed only by Qasdi as CO of No. 17 Squadron.

During this period No. 2 Squadron and the associated Flight from No. 17 Squadron were based at Idku, and still had Wing Commander Pat Hancock of the British Advisory Mission attached. According to the August 1944 Advisory Mission Report, No. 2 was considered fully operational from the start of April that year, having previous been only partially operational though already flying some shipping protection patrols from Idku. This would continue through May, and although Abd al-Hamid Abu Zaid would be sent to another RAF Operational Training Unit during May, his colleagues from No. 17 Squadron attached to No. 2 Squadron on rotation would continuing flying shipping protection patrols.

Abu Zaid's first flights of April 1944 were both on the 4th, being an "air test" at 1910 in Hurricane M (LB676) and an unspecified flight at 1410 in Hurricane K (LB425). The following day he may have taken off at 1100 in Hurricane D (serial unknown) for "High level bombing on harbour" which was presumably a training exercise in or near Alexandria". However, this entry in the logbook was out of sequence, between 1944/04/10 and 1944/04/16, so perhaps the date should have been written as 1944/04/15. On 6 April he flew Hurricane S (LB563) at 1120 for an unspecified reason, and then went up in Hurricane K (LB425) for "Cine camera practice", presumably meaning training in the use of a gun-camera. Abu Zaid also flew twice on 7 April, though for unspecified reasons, taking off at 0925 in Hurricane F (LB789) and at 2010 in Hurricane A (serial number not specified, though a photograph shows it to have been KZ886). These were followed by single flights for unspecified reasons on the 8th and 9th, in Hurricane R (LB831) and Hurricane S (LB563) at 1400 and 1005 respectively. On the 10th he flew twice; the first take-off at 0800 in Hurricane F (LB789) being for an unspecified reason while the second at 1050 in the same aeroplane was for "Army Cooperation along the coast". Abu Zaid also made two flights on 16 April; the first at 1000 in Hurricane M (LB676) being an "Interception", while the reason for the second at 1505 in Hurricane R (LB831) was not mentioned.

According to the Advisory Mission Report dated 27 April 1944, No. 2 Squadron's shipping patrols off Alexandria were no longer operationally necessary, and while the pilots were good, the maintenance of their Hurricanes was not. Squadron Leader (later Wing Commander) N.P. Hancock was still attached to No. 2 Squadron to assist in operational training and his logbook indicates that the unit moved to Marsa Matruh on 17 April for continued convoy protection work. The move was presumably to make them more useful, and Abu Zaid's logbook strongly suggests that this did indeed happen.

After some days without flying during No. 2 Squadron's move from Idku to Marsa Matruh, Abu Zaid flew a "Patrol scramble" on 21 April at 1000 in Hurricane M (LB676), followed on the 22nd by an unspecified flight at 1625 in the same aeroplane. The next few days were busy for Abu Zaid before he was sent on another RAF OTU course. 23 April saw him first take-off at 0930 in Hurricane S (LB563) for an unspecified reason, then taking off again at 1735 in Hurricane M (LB676) for a "Scramble over convoy". This may have involved the same naval convoy that caused Abu Zaid to take-off twice on 24 April; first at 1010 again in Hurricane M (LB676) for "Over convoy, eight split section and interception", and again at 1200 in Hurricane R (LB831) for "Scramble over convoy". The following day Aby Zaid flew two training sorties; the first at 1135 in Hurricane J (serial number unknown) for "Cine camera" work, and the second at 1725 in the squadron's Harvard with Flight Lieutenant Morgan for "Air firing at drogue". This Harvard had the individual identification letters AD, but its serial number is unknown.

Part or all of No. 2 Squadron apparently moved back to Idku late in April, which would account for Abu Zaid's logbook recording that on the 26th he took up Hurricane R (LB831) at 1050 for "Army Cooperation harbour of Alexandria". On the 27th he took off in Hurricane M (LB676) at 0925 for "Cine camera exercise", presumably also from Idku.

According to Ali Muhammad Labib;

> This squadron [No. 2] was led by the late and famous Muhammad Hafiz. I was the second officer assigned to Hafiz, responsible for communications and second in command. We were under British command and …. the responsibility of this squadron was to cover Allied ship routes from al-Sallum to Alexandria. A pair of Hurricanes would assume the responsibility of escort and would be relieved by a similar pair of Hurricanes until the ships reached the harbour of Alexandria. During the course of this action one could not help but overlook the politics of the time. There is no doubt that under the British command we gained immense experience, spare parts requests could be expected directly from stores in Britain with no hassle, technical or administrative. Each one of us would carry out his tasks to the fullest. We had one objective, to prove to everyone that our qualifications and abilities were above politics. Our squadron gained a good reputation inside British circles. They wanted to decorate us but the Egyptian authorities refused this gesture.

It would not be the only occasion that the Egyptian government refused to allow REAF men to accept British medals.

Further information from Hancock's logbook provides the name of some other REAF pilots who served in No. 2 Squadron in May 1944. In addition to the CO, *Qa'id Sirb* (Flight Lieutenant) Hafiz Muhammad Hafiz, they were *Tayyar Awal* (Flying Officer) Gamil, *Tayyar Awal* (Flying Officer) Ali and *Tayyar Awal* (Flying Officer) Maghrabi. Whether this is same man as the Maghrabi who became better known as one of the REAF's senior flying instructors is unknown. Meanwhile this Advisory Mission Report noted that the REAF still hoped to create a new fighter squadron paid for by Britain.

Meanwhile No. 2 Squadron and the attached Flight from No. 17 Squadron continued their not always tedious work at Marsa Matruh. *Tayyar Awal* (Flying Officer) Abd al-Hamid Abu Zaid, however, joined Course No. 22 at the RAF (Middle East) Central Gunnery School al-Ballah next to the northern part of the Suez Canal, an airfield which would play a vital role during the last desperate days of the Palestine War. At present, al-Ballah was under the command of Wing Commander McDonald.

Abu Zaid was not alone in being sent to al-Ballah, his training course being in preparation for No. 17 Squadron replacing its disappointingly dangerous Tomahawks and time-worn Hurricanes with Spitfire Mk. Vs. Abd al-Hamid Abu Zaid's logbook for his time at the Central Gunnery School also provides interesting information on the sort of training provided there, as well as about the aeroplanes used. Abu Zaid's first day of flying on No. 22 Course was busy. Before anything else, his abilities had to be assessed, so his first flight was at 0650 on 2nd May 1944 in one of the Gunnery School's Hurricanes (identified by the letter B, serial number unknown) for "Air to air firing on drogue", followed by a second flight in the same machine for the same reason, taking off at 0820. Next came a flight at 0950 in one of the Gunnery School's Harvards (number 915) with Flight Lieutenant Shand of the RAF, perhaps to assess Abu Zaid's other skills. In fact, the Gunnery School's assessment of Abu Zaid's abilities at the start of this course was not particularly flattering. As a potential bombing and gunnery instructor he was category B, as an air-to-air marksman he was average, and as an air-to-ground marksman he was below average. This was in striking contrast to his assessment at the end of the course.

Next taking off at 1150 on 2 May 1944 in Spitfire A6, Abu Zaid made his first flight in this type, which must have been a very exciting experience for an Egyptian pilot who was just coming up to his 25th birthday. The Spitfires at al-Ballah were, in fact, Mk. IIs, presumably all tropicalised sub-types. His logbook only identifies the machines at al-Ballah by their individual code letters and numbers rather than serial numbers, except for the Harvards which have three-digit serial numbers – perhaps lacking the code letters given to other aeroplanes at the RAF (Middle East) Central Gunnery School. On 3 May Abu Zaid flew Spitfire code A8 twice, the first taking off at 0910 for an unspecified reason, the second taking off at an unspecified time for "Bomber cooperation with self as bait". On the 4th he flew three times; first in Spitfire code A6 at 0610 for an unspecified reason, secondly at 0855 in Hurricane code A for "Air to air", presumably gunnery, thirdly as 1050 in Spitfire code A9 for an unspecified reason. On the 5th Abu Zaid flew twice; taking off at 0755 in Hurricane code F for "Air to air", then at 0845 in Hurricane Q for further "Air to Air".

On the 6th he was in the air four times. The first take-off was at 0705 on an unidentified Harvard with Squadron Leader Lynn for "Air to air check", then at 0930 in Hurricane D for "Air to air", at 0955 in Hurricane E for further "Air to air", and finally at 1105 in Hurricane code M for an unspecified reason. After spending Sunday on the ground, Abu Zaid took off at 0620 on 8 May in Spitfire code A1 for "Bomber cooperation". He made another three flights on this day, the next taking off at 0810 in Spitfire code A7 for an unspecified reason, followed by a take-off at 0955 in Hurricane B for "Air to ground" gunnery practice, and at 1050 in Hurricane L for further "Air to ground" gunnery.

This intensity of flying may have come as a surprise to Egyptian pilots whose flying time had, for several years, been greatly curtailed by the REAF's lack of spares. On 9 May Abu Zaid again flew three times; at 0800 in Hurricane identification code B for "air to air" gunnery, then at 0905 in Hurricane N for an unspecified reason, and at 1030 in the same aeroplane again for an unspecified reason. The following day saw another three flights, starting at 0615 in Spitfire code A3 for "Bomber cooperation", repeated at 0745 in Spitfire A8 for the same reasons, and then at 0915 in Hurricane code E for "Air to air" gunnery. On the 11th Abu Zaid again went up at 0620 in Hurricane code E for more "Air to air" firing, this being his only flight of the day.

On 12 May Abu Zaid flew four times, though only three of these were as a pilot. He took off at 0725 in Spitfire code A7 and at 0835 in Spitfire code A8, both for unspecified reasons. Then came what was presumably a novel experience for Abd al-Haimid Abu Zaid when he went up in one of the School's Martin Baltimore bombers, identification code S, "Acting gunner sights 0.45", at 0905. His fourth and final flight on 12 May was at 1025 in Hurricane code L for further "Air to air" gunnery practice. Again, Abu Zaid did not fly on a Sunday, this being 14 May, but at 0825 on the 15th Abu Zaid took off in Spitfire code A8 for an unspecified reason, followed at 0920 by a flight in Hurricane code E for "Air to air" gunnery, and at 1015 in Spitfire code A3, again for an unspecified reason.

There were no days off during this phase of the course, and at 0715 Abu Zaid took off in Hurricane J for more "Air to air" gunnery, followed at 0955 by a flight in Hurricane code M for an unspecified reason. On the 17th Abu Zaid made four flights; the first being at 0615 in Spitfire code A3 for "Bomber cooperation", following by a take-off at 0845 with Flying Officer Trench in Harvard number 820 for "Air to air check" to assess his progress in air gunnery. His other flights on 17 May were at 0940 in Hurricane code M for more "Air to air", and at 1120 in Spitfire code A8 for an unspecified reason. His two flights on the 18th were at 0740 in Hurricane code E for "air to air", and at 0920 in Hurricane code P for an unspecified reason. The first of Abu Zaid's three flights on 19 May was at 0620 in Spitfire code A4 for "Baltimore bomber cooperation", perhaps working with the American bomber in which he had himself played the role of air gunner a few days earlier. This was followed by a take-off at 0935 in Hurricane code J for "Air to air" gunnery practice, and at 1120 in Spitfire code A3 for an unspecified reason. On the 20th Abu Zaid flew twice, firstly at 0755 in Hurricane code F for further "Air to air", then at 0920 in Spitfire code P for an unspecified reason.

On Sunday 21 May Abu Zaid again had a day without flying, this perhaps being the RAF Gunnery School's policy, but on the 22nd he was in the air four times. The first flight was at 0615 in Spitfire code A6 for an unspecified reason, then at 0740 in Hurricane code N, again for unspecified reasons, followed by taking off at 1005 in Hurricane code F for "Air to ground" gunnery practice, and at 1115 in Hurricane code D for an unspecified reason. May 23 was unusual because reasons were specified for all three of Abu Zaid's flights. The first was at 0615 in Spitfire code A6 for "Bomber cooperation", the second at 0850 in Hurricane code F for "Air to air, drogue shot down" which must have given Abu Zaid considerable satisfaction, the third at 0954 in Hurricane code L for further "Air to air" gunnery. His final flights of May 1944 were all for unspecified reason; at 0840 on 24 May in Spitfire code A7, at 1910 that same day in Hurricane code D, and finally at 0900 on the 25th in Hurricane code H. A summary by Squadron Leader Lynne, the CO of A Flight at al-Ballah, of Abd al-Hamid Abu Zaid's performance at the end of his course stated that; "His air gunnery shows considerable improvement: example, on 1944/05/08 had two shoots of 200 rounds each, first of 12 hits, second of ten hits [6 percent and 5 percent], but on 1944/05/22 had two shoots of 200 rounds each, with 25 hits [17.5 percent])".

It was presumably also during his time at the RAF Middle East Central Gunnery School that Abd al-Hamid Abu Zaid picked up tips on how to fight various types of enemy aeroplane. For example, Tahir Zaki, who would fly as a close colleague of Abu Zaid during the Palestine War, told the author that that it was from the RAF that; "He learned that the Spitfire tended to pull to one side and if you attacked a Me 109 it was best to approach it from the left because it could roll away to the right as quickly as to the left".

After his gunnery course at al-Ballah, Abu Zaid returned to his REAF colleagues at Idku where they had themselves been training for about a month. The first page of his logbook after returning was signed by the CO of No. 17 Squadron, though without his name being mentioned, and without the usual over-stamping by the CO of No. 2 Squadron. June would, in fact, see No. 2 Squadron suffer a major loss, though the month began well enough according to Abu Zaid's logbook. On the 6th, the first of his two sorties was at 1030 in Hurricane M (LB676) for "Interception practice on turret" which was probably associated with Alexandria's new "Barron" coastal defence system started back in October 1941. Later the same day Abu Zaid took off at 1320 in the same Hurricane for "Scramble patrol on coast", possibly to protect ships lying off Alexandria.

On 8 June 1944 two Hurricanes from the No. 17 Squadron Flight attached to No. 2 Squadron, disappeared over the Mediterranean after taking off from Idku. The aeroplanes and their pilots, *Tayyar Awal* (Flying Officer) Gamil Khalil al-Daba and *Tayyar Awal* (Flying Officer) Sa'ad al-Din Husain were never found. According to Squadron Leader N.P. Hancock, who was attached to No. 2 Squadron, Gamil had been with No. 2 rather than No. 17 Squadron. When interviewed by the author in 1998, Hassan Tawfiq's daughter Mona Tawfik said that one of these officers was also an engineer who could strip down and rebuild an engine within one day, which was so fast that he got a special medal. Unfortunately, she could not remember which of them it was.

Their disappearance was never explained although the British apparently suggested they were shot down by German aircraft. In fact, the Luftwaffe made no combat claims in this theatre on 8 June. Meanwhile some of their Egyptian colleagues suggested the old Hurricanes may have failed. There was also the possibility of a collision which might, in retrospect, seem the most likely explanation. They reportedly took off in formation during the morning and headed out over the sea. When they did not return at the expected time, and no message had been received, Abu Zaid was one of those sent to look for the missing men. He took off at 1415 in Hurricane C (LB548) for a "Search patrol". A subsequent additional entry for this same day, repeated the time of 1415 and noted "1 hr. 45 mins. F/O Gamil and F/O Sa'ad took off in formation over the sea and were lost". Its meaning it not entirely clear, as the previous entry shows that it was Abu Zaid himself who had taken off at 1415. So, either Gamil and Sa'ad had taken off one and three-quarters of an hour earlier, or Abu Zaid searched for that period of time.

On the following day, 9 June 1944, Abu Zaid was one of those who flew twice in search of their missing colleagues; taking off at 0645 in Hurricane E (serial number unknown) on a "Search patrol", and again at 0800 in the same aeroplane, again on a "Search patrol". Additional notes in Abu Zaid's logbook concerning these two sorties stated that after taking off at 0645 "1 hr. Went to sea, nothing seen", and after taking off at 0800 "3 hrs. 25 mins. Went to sea, about 260 miles but found nothing". The style of these entries suggests that on the previous days the reference to 1 hr. 45 mins indicated the length of Abu Zaid's search.

Hope now seems to have been abandoned and Abu Zaid's next flight was on 11 June, taking off at 1705 in Hurricane code V (serial number unknown) for an unspecified reason. This was followed at 1525 on 12 June in Hurricane P (serial unknown), again for an unspecified reason. 14 June saw Abu Zaid take-off at 1600 in Hurricane M (KZ727), "Ferrying aircraft from Helwan", this being the first of two aeroplanes to replace those lost on 8 June. Its individual identification letter M had previously been used on Hurricane LB676, which was itself not mentioned again. So, one may assume that either Gamil or Sa'ad were flying Hurricane M (LB676) when they were lost.

On 15 June No. 2 Squadron moved back to Marsa Matruh, but Abu Zaid did not make this move until the 17th which perhaps suggest that the attached Flight from No. 17 Squadron remained at Idku for a few days. On the 16th he ferried the second replacement aeroplane from Hilwan, taking off at 1600 in a Hurricane with the individual code letter J, though unfortunately its serial number was not mentioned. This nevertheless suggests that the previous Hurricane code J may have been the other machine lost on the 8th. On 17 June Abu Zaid, and presumably his colleagues in the detached Flight from No. 17 Squadron, flew to Marsa Matruh, taking off at 1030 in the first replacement Hurricane code M (KZ727) "Cross country BF to Marsa Matruh". The meaning of BF is unknown.

Three days later, on 20 June 1944, Abu Zaid took off at 1000 in Hurricane code V or U (serial numbers of both being unknown) flying "Cross country to Bak Bak [Buq Buq] and back". An additional note for this flight stated "35 mins. Sand storm B.M.C.O. 13.230". Buq Buq lay well to the west of Marsa Matruh and close to the

Libyan frontier. There was then a break for a few days, perhaps while what appears to have been a detached Flight of No. 17 Squadron, got settled in at Buq Buq airfield. Back in Cairo Egypt lost its first flying hero on 23 June, when Muhammad Sidqi unexpectedly died of a heart attack at the young age of 46 after suffering from a cold.

On the 24 June Abu Zaid was in the air again, taking off at 2005 in Hurricane M (now KZ727) for "Night operation escorting CO". The following day he flew twice, to Sidi Barrani and back; taking off at 0545 in Hurricane code P (serial number unknown) "Cross country to Sidi Barrani as fighter watch"; then again at 0850 in the same aeroplane "Back from Sidi Barrani". This was repeated on 26 June, taking off at 1025 in Hurricane M (now KZ727) "To Barrani extra fighter watch", and again at 1730 in the same aeroplane "Back from Sidi Barrani". On the 27th he took off in Hurricane P (serial number unknown) for an unspecified reason. After a brief pause Abu Zaid was flying again on 3 July, taking off at 1515 in Hurricane V (serial unknown) "Cross country Barrani and back". Other features of Abd al-Hamid Abu Zaid's logbook for this period show that he was currently part of B Flight under *Tayyar Awal* Qasdi, while the use of green ink now seems to have indicated convoy protection work.

The months of July and August seem to have been quieter for Nos. 2 and 17 Squadrons, though they were still involved in convoy protection work as well as training. On 2 July Abu Zaid took off at 1220 in Hurricane code B (serial number unknown) to fly "Cross country to Marut, 55 mins", probably to the aerodrome at Maryut. After a week without flying, he took off at 1105 on 9 July in Hurricane V (serial number unknown), this time in "Battle formation escorting direct to Matruh, 1 hr. 5 mins", though it unclear where he took off from. 12 July saw Abu Zaid take-off at 1130 in Hurricane G (serial number unknown but possible LB927) for "Night operations escorting Cinderella", the latter perhaps a code-name for something unknown.

After another week without flying, Abu Zaid made two ferry flights on the 20th. The times of both the take-offs are blank in his logbook, but the first was in Hurricane F (LB789) as "Ferry flight to Sidi Barrani, 30 Mins". and the second was in Hurricane code A (serial number unknown) as "Ferry flight to Mersa Matruh, 30 mins". On the 21st he took off at an again unspecified time in Hurricane S (LB563) "To Barrani for ground firing test", and, presumably after this test had been carried out, flying "Back to Matruh, 30 mins" in the same aeroplane. Both of Abu Zaid's last flights in July 1944 were operational rather than training, taking off at 0620 on the 29th in Hurricane S (LB563) for "Ops low cover on convoy, 1 hr. 55 mins", and at 1125 in the same Hurricane for "Ops low cover on Strand, 2 hrs". The use of the name or word Strand suggests that the latter flight was along or immediately above the coast and beach.

This section of Abu Zaid's logbook was signed off by Hafiz Muhammad Hafiz, standing in for Qasdi as CO of No. 17 Squadron or the detached Flight with No. 2 Squadron Perhaps *Tayyar Awal* Qasdi had returned to Almaza to command the rest of No. 17 Squadron or maybe he was in Cairo for a REAF enquiry into the loss of two pilots on 8 June.

The British Advisory Mission Report produced in August 1944 again noted a significant and continued improvement in No. 2 Squadron, largely attributing this to the fact that it had been under direct RAF control. Whether the Egyptian personnel of No. 2 Squadron would have seen it simply as a consequence of British influence is doubtful. On 1 August Abu Zaid took off at 1650 in Hurricane S (LB563) to fly "Cross country formation to Sollum [Salum] and back". The following day he took off at 1635 in the squadron hack Avro 626 (serial number J310) with Squadron Leader Lauson, "Cross country to Alexandria", probably giving Lauson a lift. On the 3rd the two men returned, having taken off at 1035 in the same Avro 626. Lauson is believed to have been attached to No. 17 Squadron as an advisor. Later that day Abu Zaid flew Hurricane N (serial number unknown), having taken off at 1945 for an unspecified reason.

There was then a long break until Abu Zaid flew again on 28 August, taking off at 1220 in Hurricane E (serial number unknown) for cross country "Alexandria to Matruh". He was presumably still at Matruh the following day, 29 August, when he took up Hurricane L (LB607) for "Cine camera practice". Less than an hour later Abu Zaid took off in Hurricane V (serial number unknown), for "Cine camera as target". This volume of Abd al-Hamid Abu Zaid's pilot's logbook concluded with his flight on 31 August 1944, taking off at 1830 in Hurricane K (LB425) for an unspecified reason; it was then stated that Abu Zaid was a member of B Flight and was signed off by his CO, *Tayyar Awal* (Flying Officer) Qasdi. None of his subsequent logbooks have yet been made available for research, and it is not until 8 June 1948, almost a month into the Palestine War, that we know in detail what Muhammad Abd al-Hamid Abu Zaid was doing.

Just over a week after the end of Abu Zaid's only available logbook, Tayyar Awal (Flying Officer) Midhat Muhammad Qasdi, who had been included in a British intelligence report list of potential "pro-Palace" subversives back in 1942, was killed following a collision with an RAF Bristol Beaufighter of No. 108 Squadron over Marsa Matruh aerodrome. The crew of the RAF aeroplane were also killed. The accident probably occurred on 11 September, as stated by the British Advisory Mission, though Squadron Leader Hancock's records have the date as 15 September. Qasdi was also said to be flying a Hurricane of No. 2 Squadron. A subsequent RAF inquiry decided that both pilots had been at fault, but the Egyptians were of the opinion that neither airman was to blame and that the accident resulted from a RAF ground controller instructing the Beaufighter to make his landing approach through the path of a flight of REAF Hurricanes which were already airborne.

On 20 November 1944 No. 2 Squadron returned from Marsa Matruh to Idku where it continued to cooperate with the Royal Navy and the Alexandria anti-aircraft units in air defences. Even so No. 2 was soon almost grounded as the supply of RAF spares dried up once shipping protection patrols ended. In February 1945 the squadron was finally returned to full Egyptian control, but it nevertheless spent the rest of the war continuing to cooperate with the Royal Navy and Alexandria anti-aircraft defences in various training exercises.

Compared with the excitement at No. 2 Squadron, No. 3 Squadron's work must occasionally have been tedious. Those pilots and aircrew who had not been transferred to other units continued to ferry VIPS around the country, and to take some of their fellow REAF officers to and to and from Haifa, Beirut and elsewhere. Meanwhile, in January 1944 Muhammad Adli Kafafi was promoted to the rank of *Qa'id Sirb* (Flight Lieutenant).

No. 2 Squadron's VIP Flight would also become an official Royal Flight, commanded by *Qa'id Sirb* (Flight Lieutenant) Hassan Aqif. He came from an old Turkish-Egyptian family which had long served the Turco-Albanian Muhammad Ali dynasty which had ruled Egypt since the early nineteenth century. He was also the only REAF officer among those suspended or sent back to the Egyptian Army following an anti-British subversion scare in 1942 whom the British refused to allow back into the REAF in 1943. Like the other so-called subversives, Aqif was not pro-German, as was claimed at the time, but he was an Egyptian patriot with undoubted anti-British sentiments.

Like some of the other officers suspended from duty in 1942, Hassan Aqif was almost fanatically loyal to King Faruq. As a reward for this loyalty – and as a rather childish way of snubbing the British – the King now made Aqif his personal ADC, promoted him to the rank of *Qa'id Asrab* (Squadron Leader) and soon designated him as the royal pilot. Under these circumstances the RAF Advisory Mission's description of Hassan Aqif as "useless" and a threat to the King's safety should be taken with a pinch of salt. Nevertheless, *Qa'id Asrab* (Squadron Leader) Hassan Aqif clearly lacked experience for his new role, particularly when it involved flying King Faruq in one of the aeroplanes of the newly established Royal Flight. Perhaps fortunately for the British, Hassan Aqif had also made himself unpopular with many other REAF officers of various ranks.

No. 4 (Bomber) Squadron still lacked modern aeroplanes in 1944, which considerably hampered the unit's training programme. It was still hoping to receive some Avro Ansons, at least as training aeroplanes if not as operational bombers, while its existing machines are said to have still lacked bomb sites while the REAF now lacked its own bombing range. So, it was hardly surprising that some of No. 4 Squadron's airmen had volunteered for service in the RAF's No. 216 Transport and Ferry Group. Others seem to have returned to the squadron after such RAF service, including Umar Shakib who thereafter continued to form part of No. 4 Squadron from December 1944 until April 1947.

No. 5 Squadron, based at Suez, was still equipped with Gloster Gladiators and had the nominal task of protecting the Suez Canal and part of the Egyptian coast. Surprisingly, perhaps, the Advisory Mission's report for August 1944 actually stated that No. 5 Squadron's Gladiator had a better serviceability than other REAF squadrons, perhaps because the ground crews were so experienced on the type, and because the REAF still had some non-operational Gladiators which could be cannibalised for spares. There were, however, operational losses, including Gladiator serial number L8040 which was written off in a landing accident on 14 November 1944.

Before losing its CO, *Qa'id Sirb* (Flight Lieutenant) Midhat Muhammad Qasdi in a flying accident in August, No. 17 (ex-No. 6) Squadron continued to have serious problems with its Curtiss P-40 Tomahawks. One had already been destroyed as a result of engine failure and throughout 1944 the squadron, based at Almaza, had to be content with limited training sorties over land – the Tomahawks having been declared too unreliable to fly over the sea. Eventually they were grounded and returned to salvage in November. From then until February 1945, when 10 Hurricanes arrived on loan from the RAF, No. 17 Squadron had nothing to do despite its personnel being fully trained. However, early in 1944 the RAF had already offered to lend the REAF a squadron of Spitfires; an idea which received some official British support because there was fear that the Americans would step in and make a comparable offer. This was why Abd al-Hamid Abu Zaid and several of his colleagues were sent to the RAF's Central Gunnery School al-Ballah to learn to fly Spitfires. In the event, the Spitfires took a long time to arrive and then went to another unit.

Under such circumstances it is not surprising that REAF pilots were both willing and able to serve in No. 1411 Meteorological Flight. Several of them were already also experienced in night flying, which was clearly needed when the sorties were reduced from two per day to just one flight at 0100 hours. The Meteorological Flight's climbing sorties also demanded an ability to fly in all weathers at all times of year. Conditions could sometimes be very dangerous and on 30 October one of the Gladiators crash landed at Khanka in bad weather. The pilot was seriously injured and subsequently died while his aeroplane (serial number N5738) was severely damaged.

According to Air Vice Marshal Miqaati, at least 20 REAF pilots were loaned to the RAF's Air Ferry Command during the final years of the war, but British records suggest that the figure was significantly higher. By February 1944 a further 12 REAF officer pilots, all of whom had passed through the RAF's Middle Eastern Operational Training Units, were with No. 216 Transport and Ferry Group where they proved so useful that the British requested more Egyptians. The official records of No. 216 Group provides further details as to why they were so urgently needed. For example, by April 1944 the Rhodesian Air Training Group was no longer supplying the Group with single-engine pilots for training. In May the South African unit had also been withdrawn from this role. In August it is clear that there were still REAF pilots in the Ferry Group as part of the existing substitution scheme, though the identities of these pilots are very rarely mentioned in the 216 Transport and Ferry Group's records.

What the records do provide, however, is an insight into how the Group was structured and trained; its main training base being at Bilbays on the edge of the Nile Delta in northern Egypt. In September 1944, for example, the proper and actual (the latter figure being in brackets) number of aircrew in service in 216 Squadron and under

Muhammad Adli Kafafi, probably now with the rank of Flight Lieutenant, seated in the front row (third from left) with his bomber/transport squadron colleagues Yahya Shinnawi and Umr al-Shakib, at a clearly important event on 3 May 1945. (Kafafi family archive) training in each FU or Ferry Unit, equivalent to a squadron under training, was as follows:

- No. 216 (Transport) Squadron: 1st pilot 36 (34), 2nd pilot 35 (33), navigator 43 (42), Wireless Operator 55 (52)
- No. 1 FU is not mentioned and was perhaps synonymous with 216 Squadron
- No. 2 FU: 1st pilot 69 (47), 2nd pilot none, navigator 3 (3), Wireless Operator 12 (10)
- No. 3 FU: 1st pilot 192 (163), 2nd pilot none, navigator 51 (46), Wireless Operator 68 (67)
- 4 FU: pilot 74 (67), 2nd pilot none, navigator 4 (2), Wireless Operator 9 (5), Flight Engineer 8 (6)
- 5 FU: pilot 139 (121), 2nd pilot 3 (3), navigator 41 (39), Wireless Operator 59 (51)

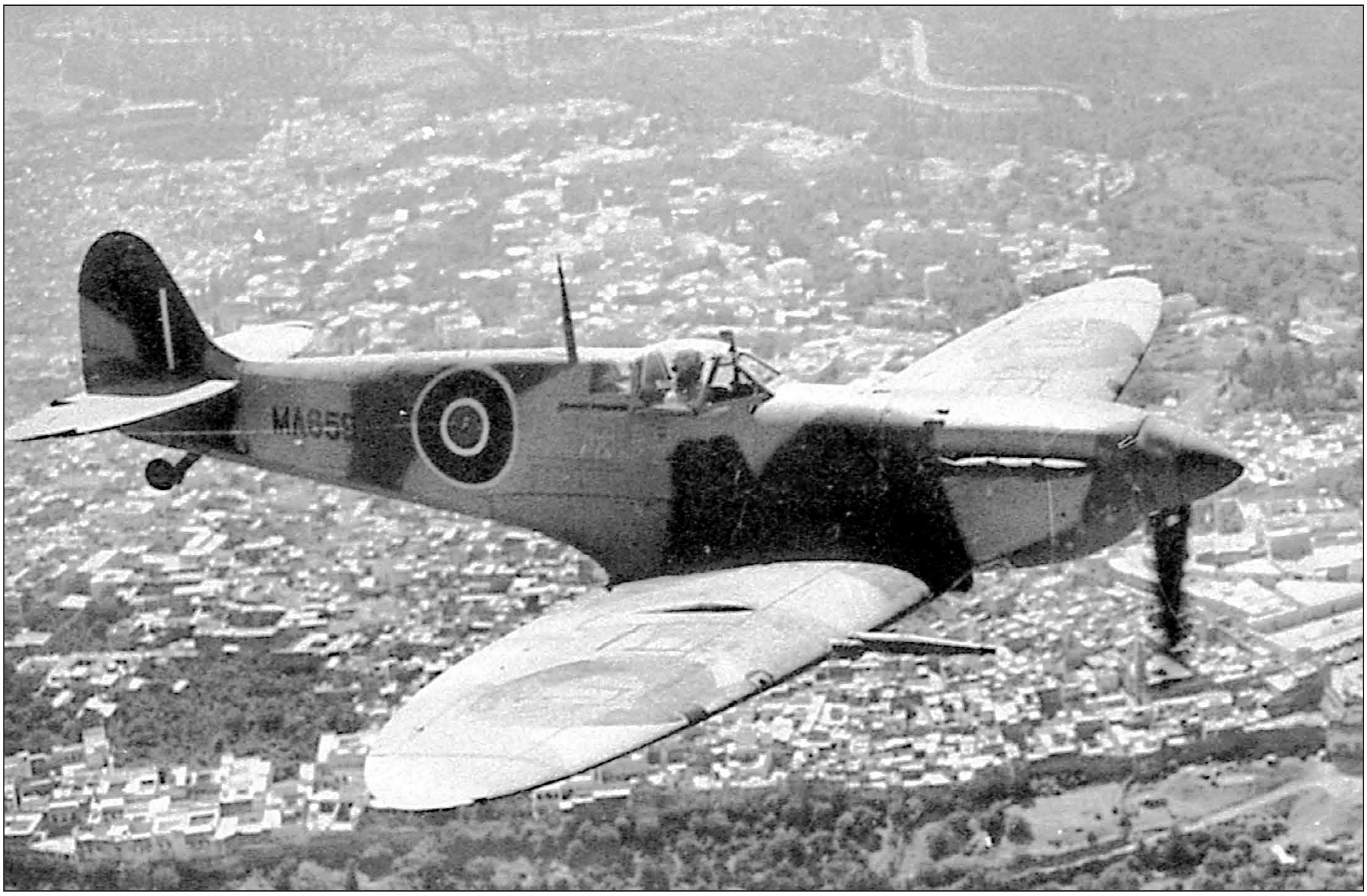
During September 1944 the highest number of students so far passed through Bilbays training for ferry work since the system of training courses began. Once a Ferry Unit (FU) had completed its training it appears to have been designated as an Aircraft Delivery Unit (ADU), and among those REAF pilots who went through this training at various times were; *Qai'd Asrab* (Squadron Leaders) Mustafa Mahir, Mahmud Shurayh, Tal'at, Sa'id Zaytun, Salih Kamel Nijati, and Halim Zaki; *Tayyar Awal* (Flying Officers) Mahamed Nabih Hashad, Refa'i, Umar Bakir, Kamal Khalil Iffat, Muhammad Sa'd al-Din Sharif and Sa'ad Thabit. They seem to have been in No. 3 ADU of No. 216 (Transport and Ferry) Group, and subsequently formed No. 1A ADU. Abd al-Latif Baghdadi and perhaps Ali Sabri were probably in a different ADU, as Baghdadi's ferrying duties took him to different parts of Africa.

Their role, like that of other Transport and Ferry Group aircrew, was to fly new or repaired aircraft to frontline squadrons. They would then bring back machines which were considered more or less airworthy but needed repair or overhaul. The latter were flown to maintenance bases. Initially, the first group of REAF pilots in the Transport and Ferry Group only flew single-engine aeroplanes from collection centres in North Africa such as Marrakesh in Morocco or Algiers in Algeria to Sicily and Southern Italy. Frequently, when the pressure was on, they also flew new aeroplanes to frontline airfields in Sicily, Italy and Sardinia, returning with battle-scarred aircraft.

According to a letter sent to the author by Sa'ad al-Din Sharif (by then an Air Marshal):

> Our mission was to deliver new fighter aircraft, Spitfire Mark 5, 8 and 9, Mustang, Kittihawk, Martinet, Fury (an error for Typhoon), to the collecting centres in North Africa and south of Italy, and sometimes to the battlefields themselves, and to bring back aircraft for maintenance or repair. We ferried more than 350 new aircraft to the battlefield and approximately 200 aircraft [back] to be repaired.

These figures apparently represent the aeroplanes ferried in both directions between North Africa and southern Europe. One of the main dangers came from all too frequent engine failures, sometimes while flying over the Mediterranean Sea, as described by Sa'ad al-Din Sharif in his letter; "We faced during one year, 1944, two dangerous factors, bad weather and unserviceable aircraft which had to be



An RAF Supermarine Spitfire Mk. V, upgraded to Mark 9 (number MA85) when it was being flown to or from a frontline operational unit by No. 3 Air Transport and Ferry Group in North Africa, probably over Morocco, in August 1943. Egyptian volunteer pilots played a significant though rarely recognised role in the RAF Air Transport and Ferry system (Author's collection) ferried back to maintenance units across the Mediterranean from Sardinia and south of Italy to North Africa".

During one such trip Sa'ad al-Din Sharif was flying a Mustang from Corsica to Marrakesh. Prior to take-off he was warned of a potential engine problem and in fact the engine played up during take-off. During the flight it stopped, leaving the propellor to idle. Sa'ad al-Din Sharif prepared to bale out but before he could do so the engine restarted. It stopped and again restarted as he approached the Algerian coast but was now misfiring. So he made an emergency landing at the closest airfield which was Annaba airbase, then known as Bône airfield, in the north-eastern corner of Algeria.

Three REAF pilots were, in fact, killed during these missions. They were *Qa'id Sirb* (Flight Lieutenant) Zaitun who had been listed by British Intelligence as a possible "pro-Palace subversive" in 1942. He was killed in a flying accident near Abu Qir. *Qa'id Sirb* (Flight Lieutenant) Sa'id Sabit was killed at Tunis, and *Tayyar Thani* (Pilot Officer) Rafa'i died when his Mustang exploded during a thunderstorm 95km east of Algiers. Egyptian records state that Rafa'i was killed on 24 September 1944. However, the operational records of No. 216 Transport and Ferry Group state that only one Mustang was lost and one pilot killed, around this time in this area. It was on 29 September; the aeroplane being serial number KH553 which was being ferried by No. 3 FU. The serial number indicates that it was a Lend-Lease Mustang Mk.III.

Such ferry work also included flights to and from southern France following the Allied invasion of southern France on 15 August 1944. This opening of a new front broadened the Egyptians' field of operations still further. Thus, by the end of 1944 Egyptian ferry pilots alone, not including their comrades from other countries, had transported over 850 aircraft to and from various fronts. For the REAF these secondments of pilots to No. 216 Group provided extremely valuable operational experience. Consequently, the REAF's Director wanted the men back after a six-month tour of duty, so that they could be replaced by others. The RAF, however, wanted to hang on to experienced men, rather than training more, and it was the British who got their way.

Valuable, if rather different, experience was gained by REAF personnel who now operated RAF barrage balloons and radio stations within Egypt. From late November 1943 to January 1944 the Egyptian-operated No. 974 Balloon Squadron had taken over A Flight at Siyrabiyum (Serapeum), plus part of B Flight at Jiniyfah (Geneife) and al-Shatt, all of which were along the southern half of the Suez Canal. These became No. 2 REAF Balloon Squadron under *Tayyar Awal* (Flying Officer) Salah al-Din Mustafa and *Dabat Saff* (Warrant Officer) Isma'il Muhammad al-Minaiwy, who took command on the night of 19/20 December 1943. The following month they also took command of the rest of the Balloon Squadron, Salah al-Din Mustafa inspecting No. 980 Ballon Squadron before also taking command of this in January 1944.

According to an Advisory Mission Report of February, the Egyptian-manned and -commanded balloon squadrons were under No. 260 Wing RAF whose HG was at Ismailiya. Egyptian personnel were also currently being trained in balloon work at Ismailiya, having taken over the RAF units. The REAF's responsibilities continued to be extended and another balloon unit, C Flight, was formed. Its 86 personnel began training on 15 April, including instruction on how to operate barrage balloons from the water, from pontoons or from ships. Under *Tayyar Awal* (Flying Officer) Mikkawi, it became the REAF No. 8 Balloon Flight on 1 July 1944. Mikkawi himself had previously served in the RAF's No. 206 (Balloon Maintenance) Wing which was responsible for both maintenance and the supply of hydrogen for balloons. Once these men had proved their competence and reliability, the REAF was given responsibility for the balloon defences of Port Sa'id and Suez. Thus they eventually operated the RAF's Nos 974, 980 and subsequently also in August No. 971 Balloon Squadron at Alexandria. The men in command were all *Dabat Saff* Warrant officers. However, in November 1944 the balloon defences along the Suez Canal and around Alexandria were disbanded as no longer needed. Instead, the Egyptians were transferred to other sites and by 1945 January the REAF was operating all remaining balloon squadrons in Egypt

Egyptian troops were already defending some Allied airfields in the Nile Delta, but it took rather longer for the REAF to be given responsibility for a number of radio stations. The idea was for them to take over non-operational duties in the Delta area, thus again releasing RAF personnel for more urgent tasks. The men were available in February 1944 but their use remained a matter of discussion. Amongst them was Yusuf Wasif, the first Copt (Christian Egyptian) to join the Egyptian Air Force having served as a civilian clerk for several years. Wasif was then trained by Marconi and had become one of the most experienced wireless operators in the REAF.

As it became clear that the Second World War was drawing towards an inevitable conclusion, politics began to come to the fore again, not only in Egypt as a whole but within the ranks of its armed forces. Abd al-Latif Baghdadi recalled that the recruitment of members of various political "groups" within the REAF spread to the Flying Training Collage during 1944. In Baghdadi's words:

> This offered an opportunity to contact and identify suitable men amongst the newly enrolled young Air Force cadets. It also helped strengthen the bond between them and us, all of which paved the way for strengthening the organization within the Air Force, especially as there were now a larger number of entrants to the College. We also continued our contact with the Muslim Brotherhood, despite the differences between our goals and theirs which became clearer later. The main link between us and them at this time was *Bikbashi* [Lieutenant Colonel] Mahmud Labib, who was also in charge of the military side of our organization. Furthermore, we published in their Muslim Brotherhood newspaper [articles] on how to reform and strengthen the Egyptian forces.

For some men in the REAF, the demands of military duties, political sympathies, and personal life, could become stressful. One such was Adli Kafafi, who married a tall and beautiful girl named Fatima Abd al-Rahman Kassab in 1944. Their courtship had not gone smoothly, because Fatima's family had already arranged for her to be betrothed to the son of one of her uncles. The uncle in question was King Faruq's personal pharmacist and in 1953, after King Faruq had been overthrown, there were claims that the King had used hashish and other illegal drugs. This rumour caused problems for several medical men who had been closely associated with King Faruq. Back in 1944, however, a quarrel between Fatima's father's and uncle's families led to an estrangement. *Tayyar Awal* Adli Kafafi saw his chance, especially as a close member of the family, Muhammad Abd al-Rahman Kassab, was a fellow officer.

Adli Kafafi came from a respected and prosperous family which was known to the Kassab family, which should have helped his case. Unfortunately, it did not turn out that way because Fatima's mother, Najia Hanim Hamid who was hugely proud of the Turkish blood in her veins was against this union. She also pointed out that Adli's position as a REAF pilot meant that he was likely to be killed at any time, and such a marriage would mean gambling with her daughter's future. Having already had to overcome his own mother's resistance to him joining the military, Adli knew the power of a mother's influence in Egyptian society, especially as Najia Hanim Hamid was widely regarded as the matriarch of her family.

Nevertheless, Adli Kafafi refused to give up and after a great deal of negotiation, manoeuvring and help from his friends, Najia Hanim at last agreed to the betrothal. Adli and Fatima were married in April 1944 and soon started to discuss the names they would give their future children, agreeing to take from both sides of the family. Hence their first daughter was named Munira after Fatima's father Munir, while a son was named Muhammed after his paternal grandfather. Further children were to be named after grandparents on their mother's side, but sadly Adli Kafafi's death in 1948 closed that question.

Adli Kafafi tried to keep his political activities and meetings secret from his young wife. His daughter Munira nevertheless recalled how her mother Fatima told her how Egyptian officers with shared political opinions met in various houses during and after the Second World War. One location was the Kafafi family home on Sharia al-Malik (a street in the Old City of Cairo). There they would discuss what attitude their group should take to the British and towards the Royal Palace. This eventually culminated in the establishment of what Munira Kafafi called the Liberal Group.

In fact, the Kafafi house became this group's main meeting place and when such a gathering was due, Adli Kafafi would take his young wife Fatima to stay with her family in the Cairo suburb of Abbasia. Nevertheless, Fatima discovered that Adli was meeting someone and, perhaps fearing "another woman", kept watch until the late hours of the night to see who it was. Of equal concern to Adli Kafafi and his friends was the possibility of being uncovered by the authorities. It was, he said, like sitting on a time bomb, especially as any such scandal would cause huge problems for his wife's highly respected family, as well as his own, and in particular his beloved grandfather. Eventually Adli decided to discuss the whole matter with his wife Fatima and took her into his confidence. Thereafter, Fatima Kafafi kept her husband's political secret and even helped him in the Liberal Group.

Currently this group within the REAF was non-violent but there were others, mostly in the Egyptian Army, which were prepared to use violence. In June 1944 Prince Isma'il Da'ud warned the British Military Advisory Mission that both the government and the Palace were trying to "infiltrate" or overly influence the Army which he urged should be non-political. In April 1944 around 20 Egyptian Army officers were found to be implicated in a plot to assassinate some of Prime Minister Nahas Pasha's government ministers. The aristocratic family descended from Chamsi Pasha also made the unwelcome discovery that one of its sons, Umar Sabri, had become involved with a group of young men who tried at assassinate Egypt's "unwelcome visitors" – namely the British. The *Times of London* newspaper reported a number of deaths of British military personnel during November and December 1944 while the British-controlled sections of the Egyptian media started offering a large reward for any information concerning the deaths of two members of the British forces in the Cairo suburb of Ma'adi, which was where the Sabri family then lived.

During 1944 Egyptian civil aviation continued to support both the REAF and the RAF, not least in providing repair and maintenance facilities. Whether any of Misrair's pilot instructors helped train REAF flying cadets is unknown. However, one of the country earliest women pilots, Linda Massud, became the country's first female flying instructor in 1944. She certainly gave potential air force cadets their first experiences of flying in later years, being remembered by some Egyptian pilots who took part in the October 1973 as throwing them around the sky in powered gliders operating from Imbaba aerodrome. The author saw this being done in 1971 and early 1973. In June 1944 a radio school was also set up, apparently by Misr Air Work.

Muhammad Adli Kafafi as a Flying Officer during the final year of the Second World War. (Kafafi family archive)

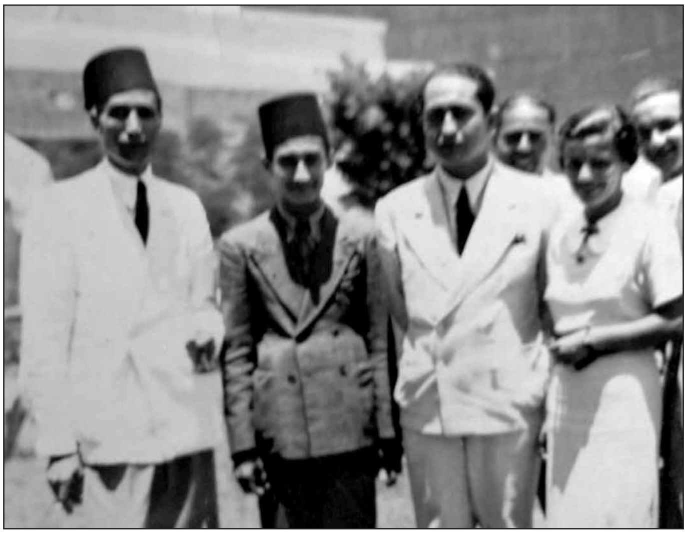
On 8 January 1945, Egypt held a general election which, having been boycotted by Mustafa Nahas's Wafd Party, resulted in a victory for the currently governing Sa'adist Party under Ahmad Mahir Pasha. On the 24th, His Britannic Majesty's Government (the government of the UK) sent an official letter to the new Egyptian Prime Minister thanking him for the REAF's contribution to the Allied war effort. Thereafter 1945 would see the Egyptian government insist that the REAF focus its energies upon its two relatively modern fighter squadrons, Nos. 2 and 17, and upon training new pilots at the Flying Training School. Other units continued to be neglected, though not entirely so.

As the Second World War drew to its bitter close far away in Central Europe, Egyptian politics turned towards the increasingly tense Middle Eastern political situation, which had the Palestine Question at its centre. Meanwhile, Britain remained a very unwelcome though unofficial "occupying power". For all these reasons, the Egyptian government was determined to build up the country's ability to defend itself – thus hopefully dispensing with British tutelage.

On 7 February 1945 King Faruq paid an official visit to his Air Force and the RAF seized this opportunity to get Air Marshal Sir Keith Park to hand over an Anson 19 complete with Egyptian royal insignia, air conditioning and what were described as "luxurious appointments". However, on that same day Prime Minister Ahmad Mahir announced that there would be no leasing of airfields to any foreign powers for any purpose after the war was over. All airfields would remain Egyptian, though foreign companies could use them if permission was obtained. This came after a rumour that the USA planned to station 5,000 aeroplanes in the Middle East after the war, for "international police duties".

It was now clear that the supply of further British aircraft, new or from RAF stocks, would depend upon Egypt becoming an officially belligerent state. Following the Dumbarton Oaks Conference (21 August to 7 October 1944), the leading Allied powers announced that no country which had not declared war on the Axis by March 1945 could become a member of the soon-to-be formed United Nations Organization. This caused the Egyptian government to reconsider the policy of neutrality to which it has clung since the

Linda Massud (centre, wearing her Misr Air uniform), honoured for becoming Egypt's first qualified female flying instructor in 1944. (Author's collection)



The famous Egyptian "aviatrix" Lutfia al-Nadi (far right) with Ahmad Isma'il of Misr Air (far left). They are in front of the pilots' mess in Imbaba aerodrome around the end of the Second World War. (Ahmad Isma'il photograph)

beginning the Second World War. Prime Minister Ahmad Mahir argued in favour of Egypt entering the conflict so that it could take part in the forthcoming San Francisco Conference (25 April to 26 June 1945) which would establish the UN.

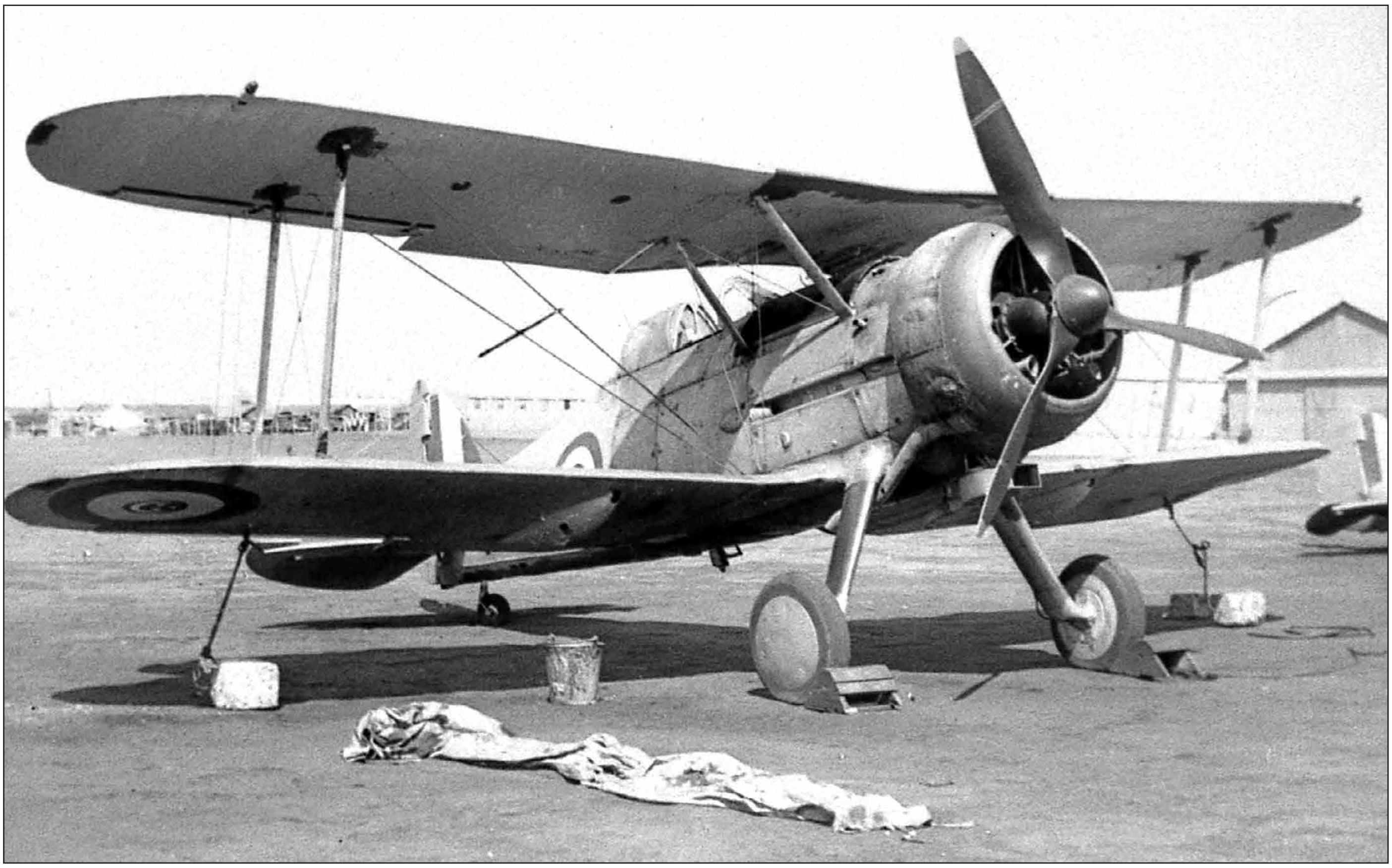
Nevertheless, most people from all sections of Egyptian society remained opposed to Egypt's participation in the conflict, even if it was only a formality, so Prime Minister Mahir set up a committee to look at the problem. Despite boycotts by significant political parties and groups, this committee eventually recommended a declaration of war on Germany. There was, in fact, already unrest because of rumours that the British wanted to form another Egyptian Labour Corps, comparable to that employed during the First World War, but now to be used during what was expected to be a prolong continuing war against Japan. The establishment of formal diplomatic relations between deeply religious Egypt and the atheist USSR caused further unrest.

On 24 February Prime Minister Ahmad Mahir was assassinated by a 28-year-old who was initially assumed to be a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. Under interrogation he later "confessed" to be a member of the opposition Wafd Party. This remains controversial. However, Mahir was succeeded as Premier by Mahmud al-Nuqrashi Pasha who would remain in office until 17 February 1946. The day after the assassination, Parliament duly approved the new Prime Minister's decision to declare war on Germany and Japan, which the country did on 26 February. On 22 March the Arab League was officially established and on 7 May Germany capitulated. However, it was not until the following day that Major General Otto Wagener and his German forces holding the Greek Dodecanese Islands surrendered to the British. The latter promptly occupied what was still technically Italian territory and established a military protectorate. The war was not over but on 9 June 1945 martial law was partially lifted in Egypt – it would be reimposed not many years later. On 15 August Japan also surrendered, and at last the Second World War officially came to an end. In reality, of course, fighting continued in many parts of the world, as it had done after the official end of the First World War.

The Egyptian government had wanted to pursue a dual policy of using the REAF to support the Allied war effort and at the same time to strengthen the REAF through a significant process of re-equipment. The latter involved a clear willingness to diversify Egypt's sources of military supplies. The American Curtiss-Wright Corporation had already opened an office in Egypt and had established contacts with the Egyptian government towards the end of Nahas Pasha's fourth term in office in 1944. This had caused concern in British official circles which feared that Egypt might move out of Britain's sphere of influence, into that of the USA. Certainly, there was a new urgency in the Egyptian government's demands for more military equipment, and Ahmad Mahir's implicit threat of introducing American competition quickly bore fruit.

At the end of the Second World War the Egyptian Army was still in poor condition, with the exception of its anti-aircraft artillery units. It was the six squadrons of the REAF which provided the country's most effective military strength, despite the fact that Ahmad Mahir's decision to declare war did nothing to strengthen the Egyptian Air Force in the short term. In fact, several squadrons were effectively exhausted by the time peace came. Mahir's policies did not even do much to procure redundant supplies from the British RAF for Egypt's two best fighter squadrons. Even the little that was obtained largely arrived as a result of British fears that the USA would rival British power in the Middle East after the Second World War.

Indeed, the winding down of the Allied war effort in the Middle East significantly reduced the scope for cooperation between the REAF and the RAF. In November 1944 No. 2 Squadron was withdrawn from Marsa Matruh to Alexandria before being returned to complete Egyptian control. This left only No. 1411 Meteorological Flight and the ferry pilots attached to the RAF's No. 216 Transport



No. 1411 Meteorological Flight's Gloster Gladiator had Egyptian national markings, as this unit was operated by the REAF while officially forming part of the British RAF. The Flight also received some relatively newer Gladiators late in the war and this machine, which has an overall silver doped rather than camouflaged paint scheme, is probably one of them. (EAF Museum collection)

and Ferry Group directly involved in the conflict. In this respect, Egypt's declaration of war had no real impact on efforts to strengthen the REAF, especially as the Second World War was clearly now drawing to a close. Some commentators have even suggested that the improvements which had undoubtedly been seen in Nos. 1 and 2 Squadrons could be attributed to Britain's fear of America emerging as a political rival, more than as a result of a fundamental change in British policy towards Egypt. There was no doubt that the USA, as a superpower, already threatened British interests in the region, not least with the rising influence of American oil companies in places like Saudi Arabia.

Egyptian air power thus remained weak in mid-1945 and of the 181 aeroplanes which the REAF possessed at this time, 96 would shortly be scrapped because they were either worn out or were so old fashioned that spares were no longer available. The end of the Second World War now saw two very different visions of the REAF's future role. To the British it would solely be one of local defence, particularly of Egyptian airfields. This British view was encapsulated in an official document written by Sir Edward Grigg, the British Minister Resident Middle East, on 2 July 1945. His defence recommendations included "a leased area and an agreed co-operative scheme of air defence and training to be worked out between the Air Forces of the two countries" (the UK and Egypt). To the Egyptians themselves, with a perhaps clearer understanding of the looming realities of the Middle East, the REAF had to be a much more effective force.

In an increasingly politicised atmosphere, the role of the REAF during 1945 was sometimes a complex and delicate one. Its Director was still *Liwa* Muhammad Mitwalli Pasha, a senior Egyptian Army officer who had taken over on the retirement of *Liwa* Husni Tahir in November 1944. Although the British considered Mitwalli to be less effective than his two wartime predecessors, at the start of 1945 *Liwa* Muhammad Mitwalli Pasha agreed to a much needed and thorough overhaul of the Air HQ at the Egyptian Ministry of War. This soon had a positive impact upon REAF morale and discipline with new and generally more qualified men being brought in. One of these was Hassan Tawfiq who was at last able to make full use of what he learned at the British Staff Course at Haifa in Palestine.

Perhaps also as a result, the British believed that relations between the REAF and the British Advisory Mission also improved. Despite the cordial atmosphere, a new problem emerged because several members of the Advisory Mission were less experienced than the Egyptians they were supposedly advising. On the other hand, some long-standing members of the Advisory Mission had developed notable skills in the delicate "political" aspects of their role. Elsewhere, on the completion of his secondment to the REAF's No. 2 Squadron on 15 February 1945, Squadron Leader Hancock was posted to the RAF's Middle East Air HQ, being promoted to Wing Commander and being awarded the King's Commendation for his services to the REAF.

Amongst the problems which remained to be solved was the REAF's continuing lack of its own repair depot, while the shortage of qualified ground technicians remained acute and would remain so for many years. Instead, the REAF often had to rely on a very small number of qualified officers. Amongst them was now *Qa'id Janah* (Wing Commander) Muhamad Ibrahim Muhamad who was in charge of the armament of REAF Hurricanes 1946. During the early months of 1945 the REAF's Avro Ansons were again made airworthy by REAF technicians who also fitted them with VHF radios so that they could cooperate effectively with Egyptian Frontier Force patrols in the Western Desert.

اللواء محمد متولي باشا
١٩٤٤ - ١٩٤٧

Liwa Muhammad Mitwalli Pasha, the Director of the REAF from 1944 to 1947. Unlike his predecessor, Mitwalli did not try to present himself as an "Air Force man" but was content to lead the REAF as an Army officer, leaving technical or specialist matters to Air Force officers. (EAF Museum collection)

A portrait photograph of Hassan Tawfiq, marking his promotion to the rank of Squadron Leader around 1945. (Tawfiq family archive)

The question of payment for equipment transferred from the RAF to the REAF remained, and in January 1945 the British were keen that Egypt pay for everything, including aeroplanes lost on operations in support of the RAF. For its part the REAF let it be known in May 1945 that it wanted to obtain ex-RAF aeroplanes from the Operational Training Units in Egypt, including Hurricane and Spitfire fighters, as well as Wellingtons which the Egyptians hoped to use on long-range anti-drug smuggling patrols over the Western Desert. RAF Middle East Command was keen to sell and Egypt was willing to buy at normal second-hand prices. Meanwhile the USA was also pressing to sell its redundant aeroplanes. British concerns about American involvement were summed up by the Advisory Mission's RAF officers who stated their opinion that the provision of the REAF with Hurricanes and Spitfires would counter American influence and encroachment. Indeed, the threat of American competition led some senior British RAF officers to strongly recommend that the REAF should be provided with modern aircraft at reduced prices, especially aeroplanes to reequip the previously neglected and now practically toothless No. 4 (Bomber) and No. 6 (Fighter) Squadrons.

Unfortunately, while RAF Middle East Command was keen to sell aeroplanes to Egypt, the British government was already under Zionist pressure not to do so in the face of a mounting crisis in Palestine. Indeed the attitude of the British government caused considerable irritation to the British Embassy in Cairo, where the British Ambassador expressed the opinion that; "The position seems to me entirely senseless. Why are there no modern aircraft available, now that they are not required for bombing or gunning Germans or Japs? On the other hand one reads that 300 aircraft are being thrown into the sea".

In fact, a number of ex-RAF aeroplanes were supplied to the REAF during 1945. In addition to King Faruq's "royal" Anson, there were 20 Hawker Hurricane Mk. IICs (loaned, and therefore probably the same machines already listed for 1944), and 20 Spitfire Mk. Vs. The REAF's desire for De Havilland Mosquito high-speed bombers for No. 4 Squadron would never be granted, though this unit did eventually get some more Avro Ansons. Nine Anson Mk. 12s were reportedly being supplied for Nos. 3 (Communications) and 4 (Bomber) Squadrons, both based at Almaza. These arrived late in 1944 and had hydraulically operated flaps and landing gear, a taller fuselage to increase headroom inside the aeroplane, and more powerful 420hp Cheetah XV engines. Late production Mk. 12 Series 2 Ansons also had all-metal wings and, given subsequent problems with the REAF's Ansons, it seems likely that this was the version supplied to Egypt.

Sadly, the REAF complained that the Ansons in question came from RAF stocks with some vital components missing, and were already suffering from severe corrosion to their main wing spars, resulting in all of them being grounded during the early part of 1945. The wings of these REAF Ansons would require 600 man-hours to make them airworthy; a fact which caused considerable embarrassment to the British Advisory Mission. The depressingly high proportion of structurally or mechanically unsound second-hand aircraft transferred from the RAF to the REAF eventually contributed to an atmosphere of near paranoia during the so-called Defective Arms Scandal which rocked Egypt following the Palestine War of 1948.

At least one Ansons Mk. 12 was initially supposed to have been for the new Royal Flight, which was to be based at Inshas aerodrome north of Cairo and close to one of King Faruq's palaces. The idea is said to have fallen through because the British were unhappy about the "technical supervision" of such a detached Flight. In reality the British were more concerned about the King's ADC and personal pilot, Hassan Aqif who was soon promoted to the rank of *Qa'id Janah* (Wing Commander). Nevertheless, the British were not yet willing to say so in public. Three more ex-RAF Ansons Mk. 12, serial numbers MG911, NK581 (which retained its ex-RAF serial number in REAF service until at least 1949) and NK583 were supplied on 25 January 1945; NK271 and NK591 reportedly being transferred at unknown later date.

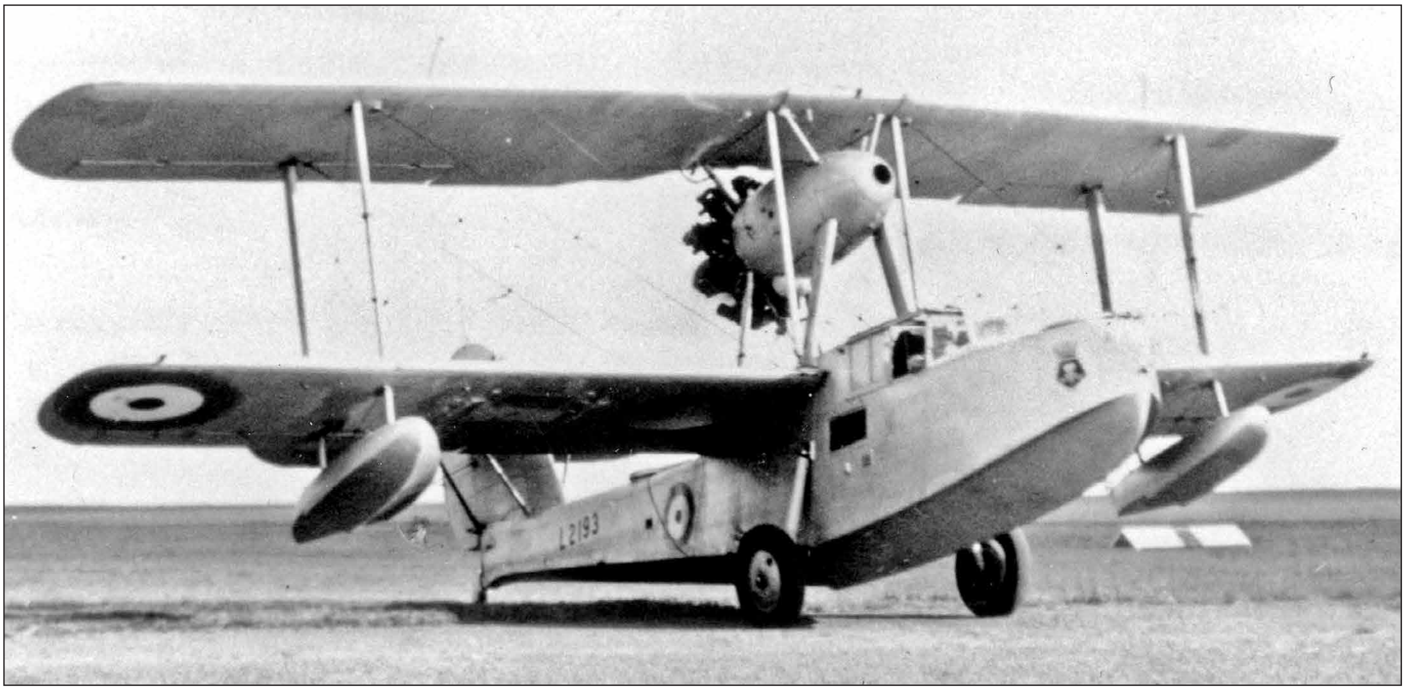
As already stated, King Faruq was given an Avro Anson 19 on 7 February 1945, the aeroplane being formally handed over by Air Marshal Sir Keith Park. Photographs show that its ex-RAF serial number, NK150, had been removed when the aeroplane was given REAF national markings and an Egyptian royal coat-of-arms. Unconfirmed reports suggest that it might later have been given the REAF Royal Flight serial number F7, though this is unconfirmed. It was clearly used by the Royal Flight, having been seen at Aleppo in Syria in 1946.

Unfortunately for the British, however, their luxuriously appointed gift was promptly trumped by the Americans who gave the Egyptian King a larger and even more luxurious Douglas C-47 Dakota. Even so, King Faruq flew in the Anson 19 to meet President Roosevelt of America near the Suez Canal a few days after receiving it. President Roosevelt had himself flown from Yalta in the Crimea in the southern USSR, where he had conferred with Joseph Stalin and Winston Churchill, to Egypt on 12 February. There the American President had boarded the USS *Quincy* moored on the Great Bitter Lake. Next day, aboard the *Quincy*, he received King Faruq of Egypt and Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia. On 14 February Roosevelt also had a meeting with King Abd al-Aziz of Saudi Arabia.

Whether or not aviation came up in conversation during King Faruq's meeting with Roosevelt is not recorded, but on 27 March 1945 the US Ambassador in Cairo presented the King with a highly polished Douglas C-47 Dakota at Payne Field (later called Cairo West). This machine was larger, faster and more modern than the Anson and even in their own confidential reports the British admitted to having their "nose put out of joint" by the new addition to Faruq's Royal Flight. According to an official British source dated 20 January 1946, the C-47 Dakota in question was c/n 44-76310. To make matters worse, the Americans then taught Hassan Aqif how to fly the Dakota, though he only reached the status of second or co-pilot.

Of potentially more immediate use to the REAF were the large numbers of redundant American Air Force aeroplanes that were standing on a number of Egyptian aerodromes, most notably Payne Field (now Cairo International Airport). There were similarly large numbers of redundant British military aeroplanes, not to mentioned British and American Army equipment. That was why, shortly before the end of the Second World War, the Egyptians set up two special committees to investigate surplus Allied war material stored in Egypt; one for the Egyptian Army and one for the Air Force. The REAF committee was under *Qa'id Liwa* (Group Captain) Abd al-Muna'im Miqaati. It found around 200 suitable aeroplanes but, largely because the Egyptian government's current policy was to buy new machines whenever possible, only 24 various types were officially purchased. A large number of other aeroplanes remained as abandoned scrap, and subsequently served as a useful source of spare parts. They included no fewer than 101 ex-USAAF C-47 Dakotas and C-46 Commandos at Payne Field, though nothing further was done before the end of the war.

Flight Lieutenant Muhammad Farag with his wife, probably after he returned from service in the RAF's Transport and Ferry Group and became CO of Dakhailah aerodrome east of Alexandria. The young lady's dress is embroidered with images of aeroplanes. (Tawfiq family archive)



The presence and effectiveness of the RAF's Supermarine Walrus Mk. I amphibians, based in Egypt like L2193 shown here, encouraged the REAF to ask for its own amphibians for air-sea rescue work. (Albert Grandolini collection)

THE FIRST EGYPTIAN SPITFIRES

According to official British sources, in February and March 1945, Egypt received a total of eight Spitfire Mk. Vbs and 12 Spitfire Vcs (including one Vb Tropical and three Vc Tropical). What is certain is that all were second-hand aircraft in service with the RAF since 1942 and 1943, and that all were at least refurbished and repainted by Nos. 107 and 109 Maintenance Units (RAF), at Kasfaret and Ismailia, respectively, before their delivery. However, there are a number of discrepancies in regards of details.

The most obvious is that of their external appearance: while most interpretations published since show them wearing 'desert camouflage colours' — apparently consisting of dark sand and dark earth on top surfaces and sides — veteran REAF pilots that flew them recalled all the Spitfire Vs acquired in 1945 as wearing the standard RAF Day Fighter Temperate camouflage pattern. Defined in 1942, this included colours defined by the British Standard 381C of 1930, as either Ocean Grey (BS381C/640) or Extra Dark Sea Grey (BS381C/641) and Dark Green (BS381C/241) on upper surfaces and sides. Egyptian veterans recalled the undersurfaces, spinners, and fuselage bands painted in 'Duck Egg Blue', which was probably the Sky Blue (BS381C/101) or, in some cases, the Medium Sea Grey (BS381C/637); alternatively, though less likely, personnel of Nos. 107 and 109 MUs might have used the so-called 'Sky Type S' (BS381C/210) or Eau-de-Nil (BS381C/216). The reason for the application of such colours instead of any kind of desert camouflage is simply that as of 1944—1945, the war in the deserts of North Africa was over and there was no reason for maintenance units of the RAF to keep stocks of the related colours. The available photographic evidence shows no signs of the REAF changing anything in this regard.

Perhaps the biggest controversy is related to the serials of Egyptian Spitfire Vs. Official British sources provide these as listed in the Table 1. However, in REAF service, none of these serials was ever photographically documented: instead, most available photographs is shown serials with prefixes EP, ER, and JK followed by a three-digit number in the sequence from 600 or 601 to 620. For example: EP601, ER602, ER603, JK612 and JK615, or serial numbers without any prefix, like 610 (known as written off in an accident in July 1945), or 620 (REAF Spitfires wearing serials from 621 upwards belonged to the Mk. IX version, which is to be discussed in subsequent volumes of this mini-series).

This causes major confusion because many of the Spitfires wearing serials applied on Vbs and Vcs of the REAF since 1945 were either struck off charge at an earlier date, while still operated by the RAF, or are known to have still been in British service well past the point in time they are known to have been delivered to Egypt. For example: the Vb with serial number EP601 was withdrawn from RAF service only in late November 1945 and the Vb with serial number ER602 was shot down in a friendly-fire incident in December 1942. The logical conclusion is that the Egyptians chose to retain the prefixes of the RAF serials to make it easier to identify their powerplants: the Spitfire Vbs sold to them in 1945 were powered by no fewer than five different versions of the Rolls Royce Merlin engine family, including Merlin 45, Merlin 46, Merlin 50 and 50A, and Merlin 55M, while the single Spitfire IX serial number JL177 delivered in 1946 as a replacement for the Vb or Vc with REAF serial number 610 written off in an accident in August 1945, was powered by a Merlin 63. Unsurprisingly, at least one REAF Spitfire V was photographed with an engine with six multi-ejectors (introduced on the Merlin 46), instead of the triple exhausts usually installed on that variant.

The serials contradiction is further increased by reports about the REAF scrambling to recover and repair whatever Spitfires it could get its hands upon once the war of 1948 erupted. For example, reportedly, the above-mentioned serial number 610 was salvaged and repaired, as were up to six or seven other Spitfire and Seafire Mk. III airframes, dumped at junkyards of different airfields in Egypt (foremost at Dikhelia) during the Second World War. While the Egyptians possessed the necessary skills and tools, and the Engineering Department of the REAF was certainly enterprising enough for such efforts, no use of such aircraft was mentioned by the REAF Operational Diary of the Palestine War. The conclusion at hand is that if the Egyptians rebuilt any of their own Spitfires or Seafires written off during the mid-1940s, and made them operational again in 1948 these were used for reconnaissance, training or other purposes, but not in combat.

By January 1945 is seems that No. 17 Squadron was reverting to its designation as No. 6 Squadron It had already received seven Hurricane Mk. IICs from No. 2 Squadron after sending its own previous aeroplanes to scrap in November 1944. Now it got a further three Hurricane Mk. IICs, all of which were, according to British sources, on loan from the RAF. A few Hurricanes were similarly supplied to No. 1411 Meteorological Flight but, as this was still technically an RAF unit, they were not counted in the total number of aeroplanes sent to the REAF. Available photographs show that the Meteorological Flight's Hurricanes retained their British national markings, at least for the time being, whereas the Meteorological Flight's Gladiators all appear with Egyptian national markings.

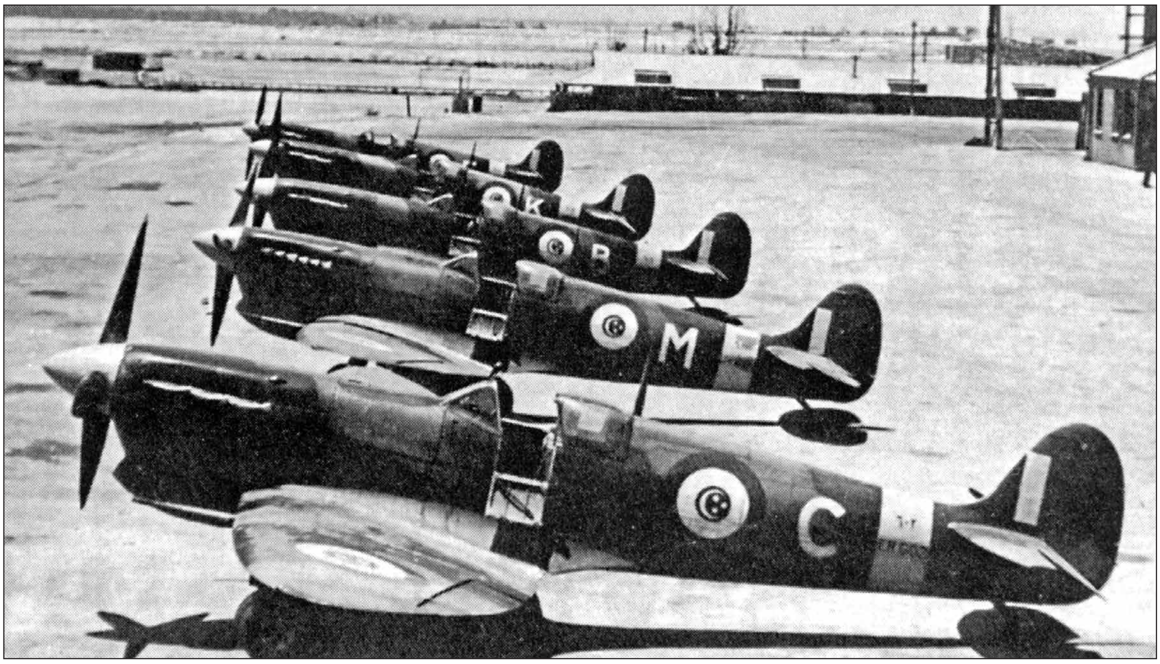
Egypt's efforts to obtain Spitfires took a long time to succeed. The British government had actually agreed in principle to sell Spitfires to Egypt back in 1944, when Mustafa Nahas was Prime Minister. But it was not until February 1945 that the first of an eventual 21 Spitfire Mk. Vs were purchased for the REAF at a cost of approximately £10,000 each. The majority were rebuilt aircraft damaged in earlier operations and came to the REAF from stocks held by RAF Maintenance units. The first went to No. 2 Squadron REAF in April 1945, before being passed on to No. 6 Squadron a year later. They proved reliable and effective, significant numbers subsequently serving during the Palestine War of 1948.

Despite having got its hands on effective combat aeroplanes for the first time since 1939, the REAF was still eager to buy ex-OTU aircraft from the RAF, including Spitfires. RAF Middle East Command was similarly eager, though political pressures continued to hinder such sales. The REAF did nevertheless get two replacement ex-RAF Lysanders around this time. They appear to have had the RAF serial numbers R2650 and R9000. According to the Advisory Mission's Report of June 1945, the REAF was due to receive four Miles Martinets for target-towing duties, though these had yet to arrive and they seem never to have done so.

What the Egyptians did acquire was their first amphibian in 1945, an ex-British Fleet Air Arm Supermarine Walrus, serial number W3016, which supposedly became the REAF's number N3016 or N3013. Given the REAF's wartime habit of continuing to use British serial numbers either unchanged or with minimal

Table 1: Spitfire Vb/VbT and Vc/VcT delivered to Egypt in 1945

Version	Serial	Delivery to RAF	Delivery to REAF
Vb	EN925	17 May 1942	29 Mar 1945
Vb	EP652	18 Jul 1942	29 Mar 1945
Vb	ER207	31 Aug 1942	29 Mar 1945
Vb	ER625	30 Sep 1942	29 Mar 1945
VbT	ER640	6 Oct 1942	29 Mar 1945
Vb	ER973	17 Nov 1942	29 Mar 1945
Vb	ER991	20 Nov 1942	22 Feb 1945
Vc	ES284	7 Dec 1942	29 Mar 1945
Vc	JG925	9 Dec 1942	22 Feb 1945
Vc	JK195	6 Feb 1943	22 Feb 1945
Vc	JK371	27 Feb 1943	25 Feb 1945
Vc	JK648	19 Feb 1943	23 Feb 1945
Vc	JK722	26 Feb 1943	29 Mar 1945
Vc	JK728	26 Feb 1943	22 Feb 1945
Vc	JK739	25 Feb 1943	25 Feb 1945
Vc	JK834	2 Apr 1943	29 Mar 1945
VcT	JK968	14 Mar 1943	22 Feb 1945
Vc	JK984	2 Apr 1943	22 Feb 1945
VcT	JL337	1 Jul 1943	29 Mar 1945
VcT	MH582	30 Jul 1943	29 Mar 1945



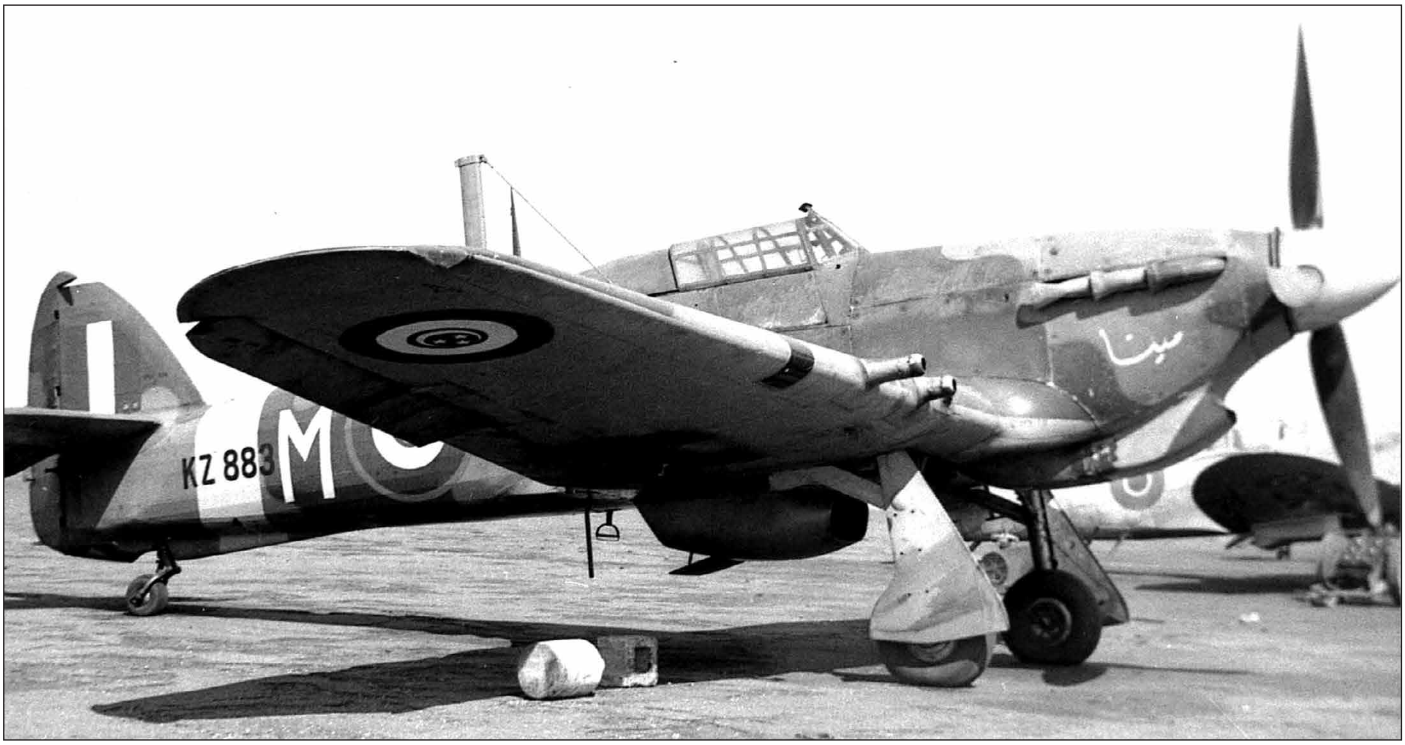
The first batch of Supermarine Spitfire Mk. Vs which the REAF received in February 1945 had green and grey "European theatre" camouflage, not "desert theatre" sand and stone as once thought. They had REAF serials in the range 600 upwards, while retaining their ex-RAF prefixes in the ranges EP, ER, and JL. Moreover, early on, all had single identification letters following the established REAF system: C (ER602), M (JK604?), B, K and E or F are visible here. (EAF Museum collection)

alteration, mention of a possible Walrus numbered N3013 suggests that the REAF actually got more than one of this type. The aeroplane was (or these aeroplanes were) based at Alexandria for several years. When Muhammad Farag returned from his service in the RAF's Transport and Ferry Group, he became the CO of Dakhailah aerodrome on the coast just east of Alexandria. Farag liked to tell his younger relatives of the pleasure of flying what he wrongly recalled as a Catalina amphibian. One of those who listened was his nephew, Abd al-Mun'im al-Tawil who himself joined the Egyptian Air Force in 1955 and became a noted fighter pilot. According to Ibrahim Gazerine, the REAF also acquired some Supermarine Sea Otters for target-towing duties, though this appears to have been well after the Second World War ended.

A list of REAF aeroplanes lost or damaged from the start of the Second World War until May 1945 was included in the Advisory Mission Report of June 1945. Unfortunately, it is not complete; nor are most of its entries dated. Nevertheless, the list does contain the following useful information:

- Avro 626 J332 damaged
- Gladiator L8040 written off in a landing accident
- Gladiator L9033 damaged (this machine had been in No. 5 Squadron in 1942)
- Gladiator N5738 in landing accident
- Hurricane Z4387 forced landing in the Delta
- Magister L217 damaged
- Magister L224 damaged
- Magister L241 damaged
- Magister L205 taxiing crash
- Magister L243 taxiing crash
- Master DL271 written off
- Master DL276 damaged on 10 April 1945
- Master DL977 taxiing damage
- Master DM227 damaged
- Master DM232 damaged

Ibrahim Gazerine recalled that there used to be a list of casualties as a "Roll of Honour" in the REAF officers' mess at Almaza, but a

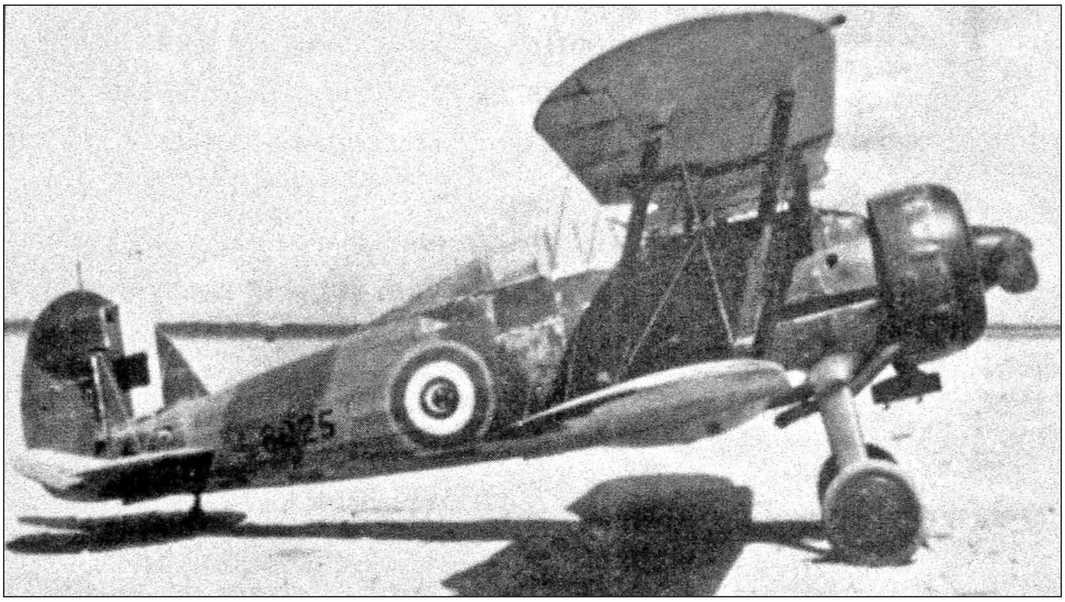


Hawker Hurricane Mk. IIc number KZ883, identification letter M, had the name Mina (the first ancient Pharoah Minoa Myna who united Upper and Lower Egypt) written on its nose. It was recalled by some pilots as "the famous Mina", perhaps because it served for so long in several different roles. Here Mina forms part of No. 1411 Meteorological Flight, probably between the Second World War and the Palestine War. (EAF Museum collection)

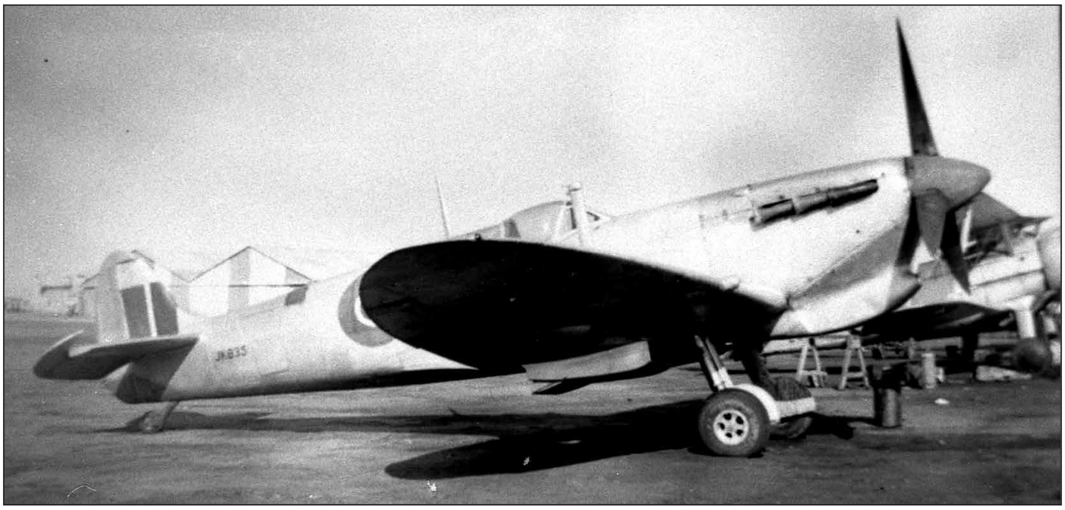
Several, or perhaps all, the Mk. IIc Hawker Hurricanes of the REAF No. 1 Squadron were given the names of historically important Egyptian rulers, and appeared in a brief news film around 1946. The example shown in these blurred images was named Muhammad Ali (founder of the current Egyptian royal family), plus what might be interpreted as "moustaches" on the nose. Like other REAF Hurricanes at this time, its individual code letter (G) was repeated on the wing leading edge between the cannons. (David Nicolle collection)

senior officer (perhaps Miqaati) considered it demoralising and ordered that it be taken down. This was probably the list displayed in the Military Museum in Cairo, which was seen by the author in the summer of 1964. Not then being much interested in Egyptian aviation, he failed to photograph the plaque or note down the names.

In the summer of 1945, the REAF's units were still based almost entirely at overcrowded Almaza; only No. 2 Squadron currently being stationed at Dakhailah. This greatly inhibited the force's operational flexibility. Perhaps this was when a story that the REAF had acquired a Fairey Fulmar Mk. I began to be passed around. It was untrue, but seems to have arisen when a damaged Fairey Fulmar of the Fleet Air Arm (FAA) No. 803 Squadron was seen at Dakhailah late in 1941, and was mistakenly assumed to be Egyptian. This aeroplane (N1980) was one of those attacked by Vichy-French Dewoitine D.520 fighters off the Lebanese or Syrian coast on 8 June 1941. The Dewoitines shot down three FAA Fulmars and damaged two others for no loss. One Fulmar had to be written off but efforts were made to repair the other damaged machine, apparently at Dakhailah. Even stranger is the story than a relatively undamaged Italian SM 79 bomber had force landed in the deep desert early in 1941, and that it had been located with the help of an Egyptian Lysander. After being retrieved – perhaps by Egyptian troops – it may have been taken to a secondary aerodrome where, for some reason, this SM 79 was wrongly assumed to have been donated to the REAF.



A worn and peeling Gloster Gladiator Mk. II of the REAF (number L8025), photographed towards the close of the Second World War. Number L8025 was attached to the RAF No. 1411 Meteorological Flight and suffered minor damage as a result of a difficult night landing on 20 June 1945, perhaps being the Gladiator scorched by a runway flare. (Author's collection)



Unlike most of the aircraft used by the RAF's No. 1411 Meteorological Flight in Egypt around 1946, this overall bare metal Supermarine Spitfire Mk. Vc (number JK835) retained its British markings, at least for a while. Other machines in this REAF operated unit were given Egyptian national markings. (EAF Museum collection)

From summer 1945 onwards, REAF personnel began the process of taking over a number of ex-RAF air bases, including some which had previously been used by the Egyptians before or during the early years of the Second World War. One such was Hilwan on the southern edge of Cairo. For their part, the RAF wanted the REAF to disperse from Almaza, which was still being used by the British, and preferably to hand over Almaza entirely. This the Egyptians were emphatically not prepared to do.

The REAF's Flying Training School was still divided between Almaza and Khanka, its senior training officer being *Qa'id Asrab* (Squadron Leader) Ibrahim Hakki. The chief flying instructor was now Muhammad Hassan al-Maghribi who was sent to Britain to visit a number of aviation establishments in 1945, including RAF flying schools, and was subsequently put in command of the FTS. A small number of the REAF's Hurricanes had also been transferred to the FTS at Almaza, being used for the final stage of training future fighter pilots, while the Magisters at Khanka and the Masters at Almaza served as preliminary and intermediate trainers. These may have included some of the old Hurricane Mk. Is, but later clearly included some Mk. IIs.

The British continued to try to remove at least some REAF units from Almaza, and so suggested that if the RAF's No. 132 Maintenance Unit was moved from Hilwan to Ismailia, the REAF's FTS should move to Hilwan in its entirety. Indeed, at one point, RAF Middle East Command considered issuing an ultimatum to the REAF, ordering it to transfer its Intermediate and Advanced Training Flights (or Squadrons as they were often called in the REAF) to Hilwan. Fortunately, this threat to the fragile relationship between Egypt and the occupying British authorities never materialised.

For the REAF the situation was made worse during 1945 when the intense Egyptian sun caused the 25 Miles Masters' wings to warp and crack, virtually stopping the work of the Intermediate Training Flight which in turn caused a logjam in the Elementary Flight and a shortage of pupils in the Advanced Flight. Meanwhile, the FTS pressed ahead as best it could, training an increased number of students. There had only been one accident during the final six months of 1944, which had involved a Magister. Now the accident rate increased. On 18 June 1945, Miles Masters DL977 and DM170 of the Intermediate Flight were damaged in a minor collision while taxiing, followed by another taxiing accident involving a Master 10 days later. Then on 21 July, Magister L237 of the Elementary Flight made a successful forced landing but suffered damage. Meanwhile the standard of air gunnery by students flying Hurricanes already surprised those RAF instructors who had been attached to the Advanced Flight since January 1945.

The temptation to push young fighter pilots through their training as quickly as possible was understandable, and at the end of the Second World War the REAF still only had a strength of around 200 officers and 2,000 men. Not all the officers were pilots, still fewer being trained combat pilots, so there was a long way to go to reach the intended size. In January, the Advisory Mission reported that 23 new cadets had been selected for ab initio training at the FTS, and some of these included men who would fight during the Palestine War of 1948–49. Probably amongst them were Khalil Jamal al-Din al-Arusi and Mukhtar Mahmud Sa'id, both of whom were commissioned in 1945; perhaps also Izz al-Din al-Tahry.

Some other pilots who would serve during the Palestine War were still at the Army College at the start of 1945, including Mustafa Shalabi al-Hinnawi. Having been pushed back a year for largely political reasons, Hinnawi's "cohort" or intake of military cadets then had to go through the usual three-year course at the Egyptian Military Academy, meaning that they remained cadets for no less than four years, only graduating in 1946. This had never happened before in the history of the Egyptian Military Academy. Under such circumstances it is not surprising that this cohort of cadets were more than usually influenced by their sometimes very politicised teachers.

> The instructors were most of the leaders of the revolution in 1952 and they were *Yuzbashis* [Captains] Gamal Abd al-Nasser, Zakaria Muhi al-Din, Yussuf al-Siba'i, Muhammed Fawzi and Muhsin Abu al-Nur, and Dr. Mustafa Kamal Hilmy the chemistry professor who later became President of the Consultative Council [the Upper House of the Egyptian Parliament]. The structure of the Military Academy was divided into three companies, each of which was subdivided into three platoons, each platoon supervised by one of the instructors. As a student I was a *Shawish* [Sergeant] in the 1st Platoon of the 3rd Company under *Yuzbashi* [Captain] Gamal Abd al-Nasser, which resulted in a strong bond between us, and shared understanding of matters.

Elsewhere the current shortage of pilots meant that training at squadron level was very difficult. Several of the most experienced men were meanwhile being sent on RAF advanced training courses, including those sent to No. 71 Fighter OTU at Ismailia and No. 74 Fighter-Reconnaissance OTU in Palestine. It seems that it was not until 4 April 1945, as the war in Europe was drawing to a close, that the British Advisory Mission recommended that Egypt be asked to pay £160,000 for the RAF training courses attended by its officers during war. Egypt countered by suggesting that the RAF might care to pay an even greater sum for various services the REAF had rendered at a time when Egypt was, strictly speaking, a neutral country. The matter was then quietly dropped.

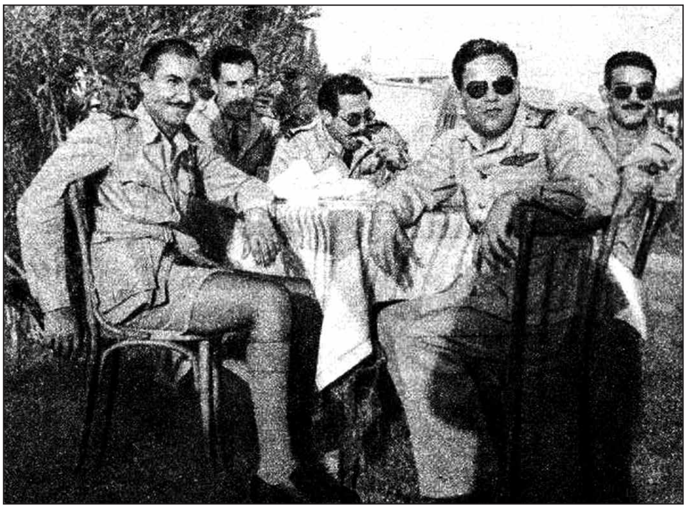
The activities of the REAF's squadrons naturally varied a great deal in the final year of the war, as they had all along. Command of No. 1 Squadron apparently passed from Salih Mahmud Salih to Mahmud Sidqi Mahmud al-Milaigi, though only for a short time, and the squadron itself was redesignated as a Fighter-Reconnaissance unit. The British Advisory Mission regarded No. 1 Squadron as the "most enthusiastic" in the REAF at this time, but its Army Cooperation and close support work was hampered by a lack of good radio communications equipment; proper VHF radios being urgently needed. Two of the Hurricanes had been set aside for a new photo-reconnaissance unit and while twin cameras and oxygen equipment were fitted, two of the squadron's officers were trained in photointerpretation by the RAF. There were nevertheless three accidents while training. On 1 June the pilot of Hurricane Mk. IIc serial number KX938 made a successful forced landing, but two days later the pilot of Hurricane KZ517 crashed on his first solo in the type and was killed. The third accident caused extensive damage to Hurricane LB894 as its inexperienced pilot overshot when landing on 23 June 1945.

By June, No. 1 Squadron had been fully re-equipped with Hurricanes which led to a marked improvement in its effectiveness. The Advisory Mission also reported an unexpectedly high standard of maintenance, despite the age of these aeroplanes. No. 1 Squadron's tasks included traditional anti-drug smuggling patrols in Upper Egypt and making a photographic mosaic of Alexandria for the Egyptian Ministry of Works. The unit also put on a ground attack demonstration for King Faruq and was generally considered to be at the same level of competence as a comparable RAF squadron. Meanwhile most of No. 1 Squadron's old Lysanders had been sent into store, though two were retained for communications work. These were presumably the two Lysanders which got lost on a flight to Bahariya oasis. They landed about 50kms south of their intended destination and were gone for six days. The crews eventually arrived at Bahariya, riding camels borrowed from the Bedouin, their slightly damaged aeroplanes being recovered later.

No. 2 (Fighter) Squadron was back under full REAF control and its 18 Hurricanes were fully operational by February 1945, its pilots having achieved exceptionally good results at the RAF Air Gunnery School. It was also in February that Squadron Leader Hancock's tour of duty with the Advisory Mission came to an end. He wrote that, in his opinion, "the standards achieved by 2 Squadron compared favourably with that of the average RAF fighter squadron although its pilots had not seen action". Its Commanding Officer, Muhammad Hafiz, was promoted to the rank of *Qa'id Asrab* (Squadron Leader) and was awarded the Order of the Nile by King Faruq on 17 February 1945. No. 1 Squadron then returned to Dakhaila between the coast and Lake Maryut where it continued to cooperate with the Royal Navy and Alexandria's anti-aircraft defences. However, by April the squadron's Hurricanes began to be grounded as a result of corrosion from operating over the Mediterranean and being parked in the open, in the sea air, because of a lack of hangers. Some, indeed, reportedly had to be scrapped. In the summer of 1945 No. 2 Squadron was due to be re-equipped with Spitfire Vs while its remaining Hurricanes would go to No. 6 Squadron. It is also worth noting that No. 2 Squadron became the REAF's elite fighter unit; its pilots bearing the brunt of air operations during the early stages of the Palestine War in 1948.

As part of what appears to have been a major shake-up in the command structure of many if not most of the REAF's units, *Qa'id Asrab* (Squadron Leader) Muhammad Abu Rabia is understood to have taken command of No. 3 (Communications) Squadron, though perhaps only temporarily. Its motley collection of three Ansons, two Percival Q6s, a solitary Avro Commodore, one Hart Trainer and even, apparently, a surviving De Havilland Moth, were kept busy, ferrying government officials and senior officers around the eastern Mediterranean, including those still attending the Middle East Staff College in Palestine. The British Advisory Mission actually considered No. 3 Squadron to be "overworked". The men could, however, look forward to receiving some C-47 Dakotas retrieved from American so-called scrap at Payne Field. In the meantime, it lost the services of one of its oldest Ansons which made a wheels-up landing on 20 June. This was reportedly serial number L204 but in reality W204, unless the preceding latter had been changed.

Two of the REAF's total of nine relatively modern Ansons, almost certainly Mk. 12s, would be reserved for the King and for royal officials. The Royal Flight was due to become a separate unit, though still dependent upon No. 3 Squadron for many services. The Advisory Mission's January report stated that this would soon be



Abd al-Latif Baghdadi and some REAF colleagues, perhaps after they had completed their time with the RAF's No. 216 (Transport and Ferry) Group, photographed on 2 June 1945. (Author's collection)

Tayyar Awal (Flying Officer) Sa'ad al-Din Husayn who was lost, along with *Tayyar Awal* (Flying Officer) Gamil Khalil al-Daba, while on a convoy protection patrol over the Mediterranean on 8 June 1944. They were both from the Flight of No. 17 Squadron REAF which was attached to No. 2 Squadron for this work. (Author's collection)

Pilot Officer Sa'ad al-Din Sharif was one of those in the REAF who volunteered, and was selected for, attachment to No. 216 (Transport and Ferry) Group RAF, serving in No. 3 ADU of subsequently No. 1A ADU. Later in his career, and with a considerably higher rank, he served as a personal pilot to presidents Nasser and Sadat of Egypt, as he is shown here. (Authors collection)

the case, though it is not entirely clear when the separation came about. It would be commanded by the royal ADC, Hassan Aqif, and was supposed to be based at Inshas, north of Cairo. However, the difficulty of maintaining technical supervision if the Royal Flight was based at Inshas meant that this unit remained at Almaza where it proved to be a monumental headache for all concerned – British and Egyptians alike.

One of the REAF's most experienced pilots, Ibrahim Hakki, served as a royal pilot but Hassan Aqif was designated as the royal Dakota pilot, having been given instruction by the Americans, though he remained very inexperienced. Consequently, the spring and summer of 1945 saw a series of almost hysterical letters flying between the British Embassy and the Egyptian Government concerning a perceived threat to King Faruq's safety resulting from Aqif's inexperience. Group Captain Chick, the head of the British Advisory Mission's RAF Section, strongly disapproved of Aqif whom he reported as visiting the Royal Flight once or twice a week. When there, he tended to undermine morale because the men were unsure whether to obey the orders of the CO of No. 3 Sqn., of which the Royal Flight still officially formed a part, or of Hassan Aqif who was also the King's ADC.

The situation became so tense that at one point the Advisory Mission suggested removing the Royal Flight from the REAF altogether and putting it under the Egyptian civil aviation authority. British reports on the problem were perhaps biased, but there can be no doubt that Hassan Aqif did make himself unpopular with his fellow officers, including some of the best men in the REAF. For example, by August 1945 *Qa'id Asrab* (Squadron Leader) Muhammad Abu Rabia, one of the most experienced multi-engine pilots in the REAF, asked to be relieved of his command of No. 3 Squadron because he could no longer tolerate Aqif's interference. It is unclear whether his resignation was accepted. What is known is that in September 1945, Hassan Aqif flew King Faruq from Cairo to Alexandria in the Royal Flight Dakota. The stream of British protest letters turned into a veritable snowstorm and never before had the British authorities in Cairo shown such tender concern for the Egyptian monarch's well-being.

No.4 Squadron was similarly based at Almaza, and its aged "Egyptian" Audaxes at least enabled the pilots to practice cross-country flying, if little else. It would shortly be redesigned as an Army Cooperation rather than a Bomber unit. However, its training continued to be held up by a lack of suitable aeroplanes, though the arrival of six Ansons helped. The return of now very experienced pilots from the RAF's No. 216 Transport and Ferry Group was similarly expected to raise morale and effectiveness. Meanwhile, some of No. 4 Squadron's aircrew had been temporarily transferred to No. 3 Squadron. One of these appears to have been Adli Kafafi. Mahmud Sidqi Mahmud al-Milaigi was in command, his reported role as temporary CO of No. 1 Squadron, perhaps having been in addition to his role at the head of No. 4 Squadron. Perhaps this

A vital but rarely exciting duty carried out by REAF and Egyptian Army personnel during the Second World War was mine-spotting along the Suez Canal. Small units, each of a handful of men, would record and where possible plot the position of mines dropped into the strategic waterway by Italian and German bombers, usually at night. (Egyptian Military Museum collection)

also reflected his role as the REAF's senior Army Liaison Officer around 1945.

Unfortunately, No. 4 Squadron's Ansons, like so many ex-RAF machines handed over to the REAF, arrived with significant problems. They were severely corroded as a result of having stood in the open for a long time, not to mention the fact that some vital parts were missing. Nevertheless, the REAF's technical crews rose to the challenge. The Ansons were made properly airworthy, were fitted with VHF radios and set about cooperating with Egyptian Frontier Force patrols in the Western Desert. In contrast, the REAF's hope of at last having a proper medium-range bomber force proved a humiliating illusion when, during the summer of 1945, a serious clash erupted between drug-smugglers and a Frontier Force patrol near Bahariya. Once again, the Egyptians had to call upon the British RAF for help, as No. 4 Squadron's Ansons were unable to deal with the smugglers effectively.

No. 5 Squadron has been described as the neglected child of the REAF at this period. Still equipped with old Gloster Gladiators, it undertook some cooperation work with anti-aircraft defences along the Suez Canal before its remaining aeroplanes were grounded as unserviceable during the course of 1945. Thereafter No. 5 Squadron only existed "on paper", without personnel and seemingly without a financial allocation from the Egyptian government.

No. 6/17 Squadron had found itself in a similar situation at the start of 1945, grounded because of the dangerous unreliability of its Tomahawks but still awaiting Hurricanes Mk. Vbs. This unit differed from No. 5 Squadron, however, in still having some fully trained pilots and ground crews – but otherwise having nothing to do. In February the first three of an anticipated 10 Hurricanes at last arrived, and were immediately used by the pilots to regain their flying skills. In July No. 6 Squadron (the subsidiary number 17 having been dropped) received a new draft of apparently newly graduated pilots from the REAF's Flying Training School, but these youngsters needed considerably more training at squadron level. According to the Advisory Mission Report of October 1945, they remained inexperienced but were "getting better", though one of their Hurricanes (serial number 610) was written off in a landing accident on 14 July.

The RAF's No. 1411 Meteorological Flight based at Almaza was still manned and operated entirely by the REAF and would remain so until the start of 1947. However, it suffered two accidents, Gladiator L8022 being damaged during a night sortie on 14 May 1945, and Gladiator L8025 suffering minor damage during a night landing on 20 June.

Four of the REAF pilots attached to the RAF's Transport and Ferry Group were withdrawn and replaced by four new pilots early in 1945 but according to British information, No. 216 Group had no Egyptians in February, the only foreign pilots being three Poles. A month later there were, however, two Egyptians, one Greek, seven Poles and seven Yugoslavs currently being trained as ferry pilots. These volunteers were important, though the majority of aircrew in No. 216 Transport and Ferry Group came from Britain or its Commonwealth. In April there were still two Egyptians, three Yugoslavs and three Poles under training for No. 216 Group.

Some of the older Egyptians were amongst those who had to convert to multi-engine aircraft. For this they trained at the RAF's No. 1330 Conversion Unit. During the course of one month 90 pilots passed through No. 1330 Conversion Unit, 13 being passed as Transport Captains by the Transport Flight, 37 pilots being taught how to fly C-47 Dakotas. Included amongst these men were the two Egyptians, three Yugoslavs and three Poles.

One of the Egyptian pilots who served in the Transport and Ferry Group, and who later rose to prominence as a member of the Free Officers Movement, as the Chief of Egyptian Air Force Intelligence

Sailors of the Egyptian Coastguard firing a salute at the burial of a Christian colleague during the Second World War. (Egyptian Maritime Museum collection)

A social gathering of officers of the REAF and their wives in 1944. From the left they are: Jamal Afifi, unknown, Mrs Labib, Hassan Tawfiq, unknown, Mrs Hasib, Mahmud Hasib, Mrs Tawfiq and Ali Labib. (Tawfiq family collection)

in 1952 and subsequently as a member of the post-revolution Egyptian government, was Ali Sabri. According to his son, Fu'ad Sabri when interviewed by the author in 2011, Ali's duties included ferrying aircraft from Palestine to Italy. He also came to be seen as a specialist in ferrying Spitfires, often flying to Bari. Less frequently he flew these and other aeroplanes to India from the Middle East. When ferrying single-engine types Ali Sabri always flew singly, not in company with other aeroplanes. At night he, like the other ferry pilots, had to navigate by the stars and often had to land by night on unfamiliar airfields.

Another of those trained to fly multi-engine aeroplanes for the RAF's Transport and Ferry Groups was Abd al-Latif Baghdadi. More than once he nearly lost his life and later, writing in the third person, he described some of the more eventful flights;

One of his engine propellers was damaged in Cyprus. [On another occasion] He almost collided with a group of high mountains as he descended on a narrow strip of rough terrain in Asmara [in Eritrea]. A group of English pilots were astounded at Aden airport as they watched him land a four-engine aeroplane on Aden's small and narrow aerodrome.

Some Egyptian ferry pilots were now logging up a great deal of flying hours and by the spring of 1945 Muhammad Nabih Hashaad, Umar Bakir and Sa'ad al-Din Sharif, all of whom were based in Morocco as part of No. 216 Group's No. 3 FU, were made convoy leaders. It was around this time that *Tayyar Awal* (Flying Officer) Sharif had another lucky escape. While leading a convoy of three Spitfires from Algiers to Sicily, Sharif was asked by one of the two British ferry pilots to swap aircraft. He agreed and they exchanged machines during a refuelling stop and "tea-break" at al-Awaynah near Tunis (now Tunis-Carthage International Airport). However, during the subsequent Mediterranean crossing the aircraft that Sharif had first been flying lost power, ditched into the sea and sank.

Only occasionally were these Egyptian volunteers specifically mentioned in British sources. However, on 3 April 1945 *Tayyar Awal* (Flying Officer) Sharif Talaat was awarded the RAF's Air Force Cross while serving in No. 5 Ferry Unit. The AFC was first given in 1918, for "an act or acts of valour, courage or devotion to duty whilst flying, though not in active operations against the enemy". Sharif Talaat had 1,050 flying hours to his credit in this unit, and the citation for his AFC stated;

> This Egyptian officer has been engaged in ferrying RAF aircraft for over a year. He shows outstanding ability as a pilot and the greatest keenness and enthusiasm for his work. He has on many occasions pressed to be allowed to be transferred to operational duty but these requests have been refused. Flying Officer Talaat's fine work and conspicuous example have earned the highest esteem of his brother officers.

By 1945, the active fronts of the Second World War were far away from Egypt, and even the threat from German aeroplanes operating of out the Dodecanese islands in Greece had virtually disappeared. Life in Egypt was gradually returning to pre-war normality. For the westernised elites of Cairo and Alexandria this meant a return to the hedonistic behaviour of what some observers have misleadingly called Egypt's golden age. The British were still not particularly welcome, but for many Egyptians they remained part of everyday life, and a job working for a British government organisation provided a reliable income and even some element of prestige.

For example *Qa'id Asrab* (Squadron Leader) Hassan Tawfiq's wife worked for the British Ministry of Information in Cairo, and as Hassan himself was often away from home, their daughters Muna and Hedi were often sent to stay with their grandmother. Though still a child, Muna was now old enough to remember her parents' social life during the later years of the Second World War, saying of them when interviewed by the author in 1998:

> Tawfiq was a very straightforward, stiff, honest man, with a few close friends but not so many acquaintances. During the war the family had daily card games at home, and as times were good in those days, they had parties every Thursday night, because Friday was a holiday [the Islamic day of prayer]. Champagne, lobster, caviar, you name it. All these friends were there always. And some others, all came as husbands and wives. Hakki Harun was amongst these, also Ali Labib and his wife [whom the children called] Auntie Melvet. Some of these would come to our house almost every day during World War Two. Also, Mahmud Hassib and his life Auntie Glad who was Sidki Mahmud's sister. Uncle Abu Rabia was another frequent visitor. Gazerine and his wife also. Hassan Mahmud made occasional visits, because he was Tawfiq's senior. Uncle Mac Miqaati also because Antie Agnes his first wife was a good friend of mummy. He came around often.

This cosy world would continue for a few years after the end of the War, as did the political activities of those in the REAF who were not prepared to accept things as they were. Just beyond the horizon, however, the situation in Palestine was approaching boiling point.

3

ELSEWHERE IN THE ARAB WORLD

In March 1944 King Abd al-Aziz Ibn Sa'ud agreed to a request from the United States of America to build an air base at Dahran, on the kingdom's Persian Gulf coast. This was to be used by the USAAF but did not reach operational status until 1945–1946. President Roosevelt of the USA also met King Ibn Sa'ud in Egypt on 14 February 1945 aboard the American warship USS *Quincy* in Egypt's Great Bitter Lake. Here the Americans presented a Douglas C-47 (DC-3) Dakota to the Saudi King, as they had to King Faruq of Egypt, and a short while later Ibn Sa'ud ordered two more. The resulting three Dakotas were registered SA-R-1 to SA-R-3, and this could perhaps be seen as marking the rebirth of the Saudi Air Force.

It is highly unlikely that any Yemeni aeroplanes flew during the war years. In fact, in May 1943 the Polish DWL RWD-13 high-wing cabin monoplane marked as YEMEN-2 was seen on the ground at Sana'a while two other RWD-13s, believed to be YEMEN-1 and YEMEN-3, were still at the port of Hudaydah in their crates. There is no evidence that they were used during the period of the Second World War.

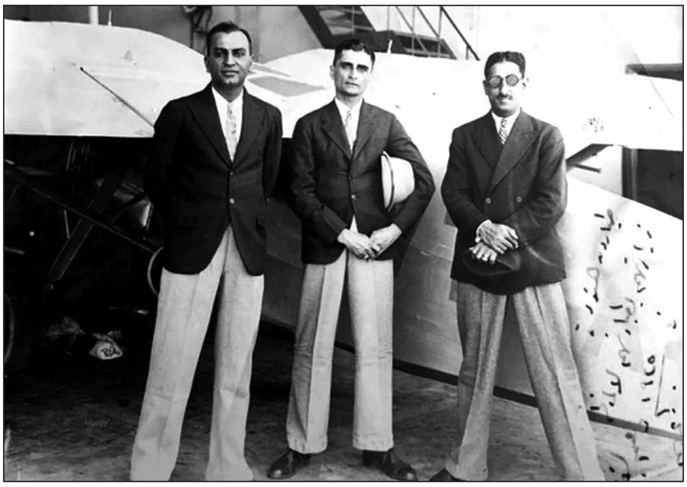
Shaykh Khalifah, cousin of the ruler of Bahrain, and his two sons, shaking handing with Air Commodore Whitney Straight, Air Officer Commanding No. 216 Group RAF Transport Command Middle East, on 18 January 1945. Behind them is an RAF Dakota. (Author's collection)

Meanwhile, the war had little impact on British ruled or dominated areas beyond Egypt, Palestine, Transjordan and Iraq – though Bahrain was once bombed by Italian aeroplanes. The RAF had started to make use of Bahrain back in 1924, initially with flights which took off from Shaibah in Iraq (see Volume Three). However, it was not until 22 May 1943 – after the Italian air-raid – that the RAF established a proper base on the island; this being under the command of RAF Iraq. Further afield other areas such as Kuwait, the Trucial States (now the UAE), Oman and the Aden Protectorate continued to be used by the RAF as points of transit during long distance flights or aircraft deliveries to and from various parts of the British Empire.

Natural disasters and other problems could occasionally draw in the RAF, despite its obligations elsewhere. For example, a severe famine in Wadi Hadramawt, in the eastern part of the Aden Protectorate, reached a crisis in 1944. So, the British organised various famine relief measures which included grain being flown to the afflicted area in British aircraft. Much of this operation was coordinated from the RAF aerodrome of Khur Maksar. Established in 1917 and expanded in the inter-war years, it barely changed during the Second World War but would be enlarged in 1945 as the British sought to spread their influence deeper into Yemen and the rest of Arabia.

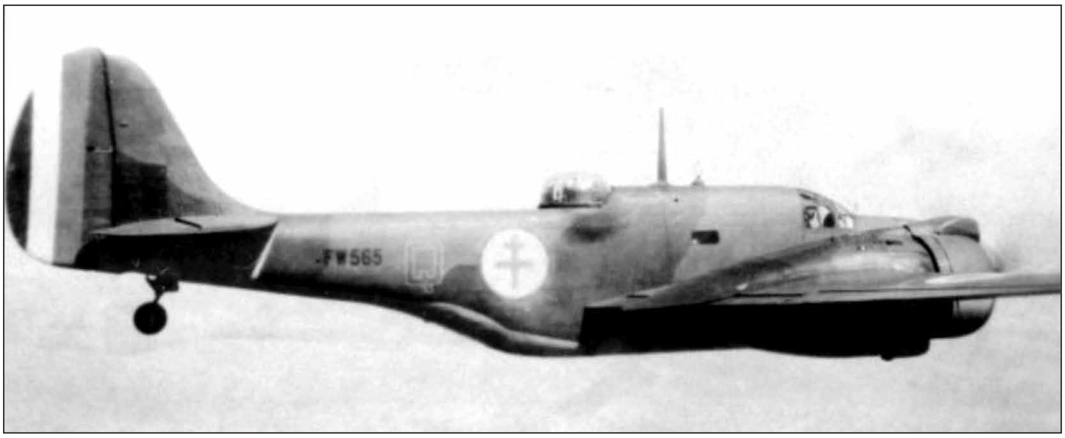
Far to the north there were two RAF stations in Transjordan during the Second World War, located at Amman and Mafraq. These remained fully manned and combat ready, but for most of the war were only needed as staging posts. After the war neither needed to have resident RAF operational squadrons though both would continue to serve as staging posts between Cyprus, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq and the Arabian Gulf.

In 1943 the British pressured the Free French into granting Syrian independence, though at an unspecified future date, along with the election of a genuinely democratic parliament which would inevitably be dominated by the country's Arab, Sunni Muslim majority. Nevertheless, the Free French authorities in Syria and Lebanon continued to recruit and build a local army of some 22,000 men which was dominated by the area's various minorities, and not by the Sunni Arab majority. This would also store up problems for the future. Furthermore, the years 1943 and 1944 saw disturbances breaking out in both Syria and Lebanon; these being put down with an iron hand by Free French forces.


Indian pilots visiting Egypt at Almaza in 1945. Their aeroplane might be a De Havilland DH 80 Puss Moth. Around this time Tata Airlines, which would become Air India, was assessing the possibility of operating a service between India and the UK via Cairo. Meanwhile Egypt was presenting itself as a leader amongst those nations which sought to gain or regain independence from the British and French colonial empires. (Ahmad Isma'il photograph)

Here it might be interesting to look at the career of an RAF airman who would later play a fascinating role in the earliest years of the Syrian Air Force but who, at the time, had no connection with the Levant though he did serve in North Africa. His name was Stanley Sutherland Duff. Born on 9 August 1922, he achieved several victories as a night-fighter pilot, the first confirmed being the damaging of a Junkers Ju 88 south-east of Horsham, south of London on 12 December 1940 while flying a Bristol Blenheim of No. 23 Squadron. He then brought down a Heinkel He 111 on the night of 5/6 May 1941 near Vitry en Artois in France while flying a Douglas P-50 Havoc I of No. 23 Squadron. Duff next shot down another Ju 88 on 14 August 1941 while flying a Beaufighter of No. 141 Squadron.

Duff's next combat victories were in North Africa where he probably destroyed yet another Ju 88 on the night of 13/14 May 1943, though the location is not recorded, while flying a Beaufighter of No. 153 Squadron. His last victim was again a Ju 88, destroyed two days later on the night of 15/16 May 1943 near Annaba (Bône) in Algeria while flying a Beaufighter from the same squadron. The following year Stanley Sutherland Duff was back in England, where he married in September 1944. Like so many combat-experienced airmen, he found it difficult to settle down after the Second World War. Perhaps rather unexpectedly Duff would find himself volunteering for service in the newly formed Syrian Air Force.



A Martin A-30 Baltimore Mk. V of the French *Armée de l'Air* in flight over Syria or Lebanon in 1946. It still has its original RAF serial number (FW565) and the individual identification letter Q in red, plus the Cross of Lorraine which recalled the Free French Air Force. (Albert Grandolini collection)

4

THE GENERAL SITUATION

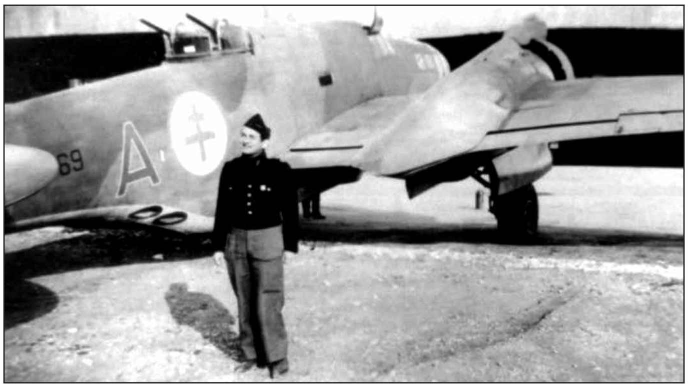
On 2 July 1945, a British government document concerning "Imperial security in the Middle East" summed up the official British attitude towards that part of the world, declaring that "The Middle East is therefore a region of life-or-death consequence for Britain and the British Empire". This was the traditional view, and remained that of the current British government under Winston Churchill. Three days later the United Kingdom went to the polls in the general election of 1945 which produced a political earthquake. The Conservative Party lost its parliamentary majority and the Conservative government under Winston Churchill was replaced by a Labour Party government under Clement Attlee.

The earthquake was not, of course, confined to British domestic affairs. It would have a profound impact on foreign affairs and, not least, on the British Empire, Commonwealth and those countries dominated by Britain while being part of neither the Empire nor the Commonwealth. The study by John Kent on Egypt and the Defence of the Middle East, shows how British strategic interests gradually changed – though this change was clearly not fast enough for most of the indigenous peoples of the area. However, in some respects the priorities hardly seem to have moved at all. The justification for various British political and military decisions might change, especially when mistrust of the Soviet Union developed in the prolonged Cold War, but the realities on the ground in the Arab world often did not. For example, an increasing British preparedness to allow a greater role to previously subordinate air forces, most notably the Indian Air Force, was less apparent where the Egyptian and Iraqi air forces were concerned.

A series of reports by British Chiefs of Staff to the government's Cabinet Defence Committee in 1946 again stated that Egypt, Palestine and various other locations within the Arab countries were still regarded as militarily essential for British and Allied defence of the Middle East in the event of war with the USSR. Furthermore, the anticipated British military withdrawal from Egypt was believed to make a continued British military presence in Palestine and Cyrenaica (eastern Libya) even more important

Butlin's
LUXURY HOLIDAY CAMPS

The privilege of carrying the REAF flag during the Allied Victory Parade through the centre of London on 23 May 1946 was given to *Tayar Awal* Sa'ad al-Din Sharif. He had flown for the RAF's No. 216 Transport and Ferry Group during the war and is seen here marching down Oxford Street in the middle of the REAF contingent on the right. (Author's collection)



Another Martin A-30 Baltimore light bomber of what had been the Free French Air Force and now the reconstituted *Armée de l'Air*, photographed in Syria in 1946. It still has its earlier RAF serial number and the iconic Cross of Lorraine. (Albert Grandolini collection)

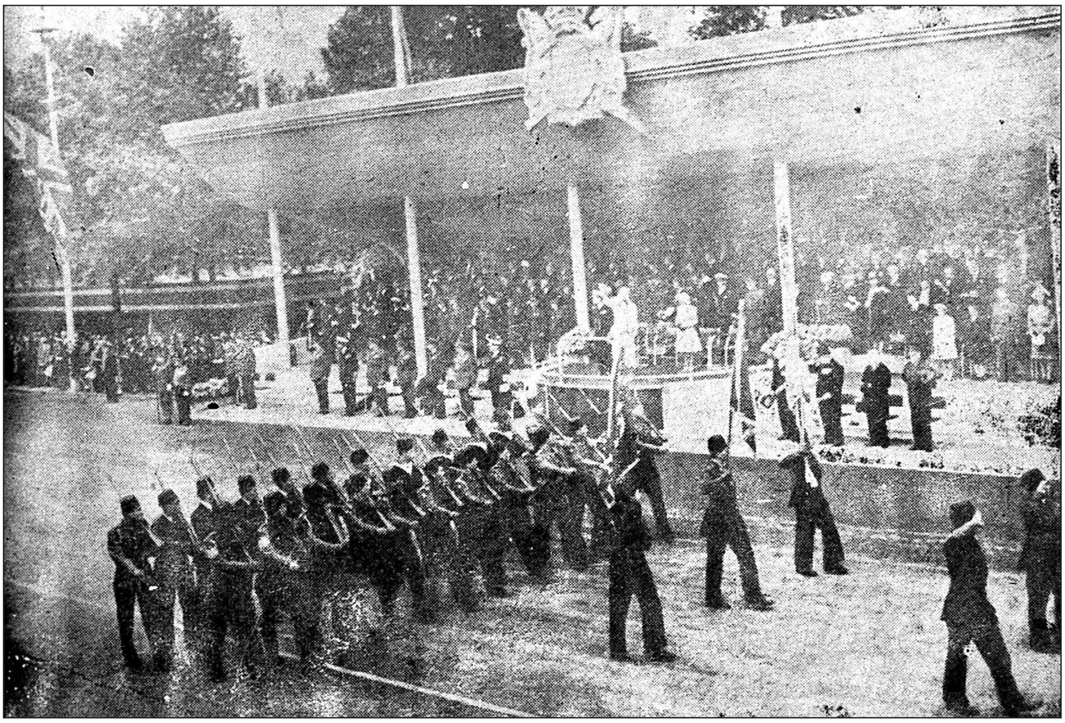
than they were already. The three provinces of Libya would not be united into the Kingdom of Libya until 1951. Prior to that, and since the end of the North African Campaign of the Second World War, previously Italian ruled Cyrenaica and Tripolitania had been under British occupation while in the south Fezzan had been under French occupation. British military documents of this sort often went into considerable detail concerning the facilities that were needed by the RAF and others in case a sudden crisis obliged the British military to return to Egypt and other such locations.

Nevertheless, in political terms the situation did change fundamentally and as a consequence British involvement in the internal affairs of places like Egypt became much rarer, especially after 1946. On 15 April that year British military personnel evacuated the Cairo Citadel. In strictly military terms this was a minor matter, but symbolically it was huge, not only for the Egyptian Army which took over the Citadel of Saladin, as it was known, but also for the Egyptian people as a whole. For many observers it seems as if a moment of real improvement in relations between the two countries had been reached. Unfortunately, the British continued to insist on a delay of several years before their final military evacuation of Egypt. The main reason for what, to most Egyptians, seemed to be Britain's unwillingness to let go of their country was, of course, the worsening Cold War between "the West" and the Soviet Bloc. The British authorities had convinced themselves that a continued British military presence in what became the officially designated Canal Zone was needed, not only to defend this strategic waterway, but also to stop the spread of Soviet influence across the Middle East. For some years the government of King Faruq appeared to bow before this British insistence, not least because the end of the Second World War left Egypt in severe economic difficulties, especially during 1947 and early 1948.

With the removal of the Italian colonial empire in North and East Africa, the only other imperial power which yet had a significant military presence in the Arab world was, of course, France. Its position was different from that of Britain. Having been defeated by Germany in 1940, then having its overseas territories fought over by the Allies, including the Free French and the resident forces of the Vichy government of France, French political and military prestige had been badly damaged, if not entirely destroyed. The aftermath of the humiliations of the Second World War also made France much less willing to let go of its overseas territories, especially when this might seem to be forced upon France – now one of the "victorious powers" – by its ally and rival, Britain.

The end of the Second World War in Europe, though not yet in the Far East, coincided with, and to some degree may have encouraged, renewed disturbances in French-dominated Syria and Lebanon. Trouble in French North Africa generally came some years later. Faced with rioting in Damascus, the French government – itself the immediate descendant of the Free French movement – ignored British and American advice and sent additional troops to Lebanon. This was followed by an excessive, and perhaps entirely unnecessary, display of military force. Damascus was shelled by French heavy artillery which is believed to have killed or injured between one and two thousand Syrians, almost entirely civilians. The British were appalled and demanded that authority across Syria was handed over to the local British military leadership. The Americans urged the French to accept this British ultimatum in order to avoid a clash between its two European allies. Realising that their position would rapidly become impossible, the French authorities in the area agreed and the British took overall control, though without expelling the French.

Britain's role in this episode in Syria's post-war struggle for independence has been almost totally – and officially – forgotten in Syria itself, and during the author's many visits to that country he



The Egyptian contingent passing the Royal stand during the Victory Parade of 23 May 1946. In addition to King George VI and Churchill, other people on the Royal stand included King Faisal and Prince Abd al-Illah of Iraq. (Author's collection)

did not find one "man in the street" or "child in the classroom" who had even heard of it. Back in late 1945 and early 1946, however, it seemed possible that British and American influence would become firmly established in both Syria and Lebanon, at the expense of that of France. Syrian opinion, especially in the main urban and commercial centres, was undoubtedly favourable to "the West" and more particularly to the USA. Unfortunately, another problem got in the way and rapidly undermined the American and subsequently also the British position; namely the Palestine Question. Meanwhile the Soviet Union was beginning to make its voice heard, loudly supporting the independence of Syria and Lebanon. Soviet support for the Zionist cause in Palestine proved a hindrance to Soviet ambitions amongst the Arabs, but that would be a passing phase.

In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War the Arab countries were by no means passive pawns in all this great power rivalry. Those which already had political independence, even if that independence was not complete, had their own ambitions and agendas. For example, Egypt suggested that, as an alternative to Libya becoming an independent state as would happen in 1951, the country's three provinces could be united with Egypt. This suggestion came long before the discovery of oil made Libya a source of great wealth. In practice Libya would have been a severe drain on Egypt's economy in the mid- to late 1940s. Nevertheless, Egyptian territorial ambitions, at least in the eastern province of Cyrenaica, probably harked back to the dispute between Egypt and Italy over Jaghbub and other smaller oases in the 1920s. It might also have raised memories of an even more distant past when, during the medieval period, Barqa, as Cyrenaica was then called, had often been under the same rulers as Egypt.

Generally speaking, the other independent or quasi-independent Arab countries were mainly concerned with matters within their own borders, this being particularly true of Iraq. Yet the worsening crisis in Palestine was now emerging as an issue around which the Arabs wanted to unite in opposition to Zionist colonisation.

Within Palestine itself, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Muhammad Amin al-Husaini's flirtation with the Axis powers, and most embarrassingly with Nazi Germany, had damaged the Palestinian Arab cause in the wider world. However, this was not the case in the surrounding Arab countries where there was a better understanding of the Grand Mufti's motivation. He had gone to Lebanon, Iraq and finally to Germany after being exiled from Palestine by the British in 1937. In Germany Muhammad Amin al-Husaini became a significant figure in the Nazis' attempts to win dissident Arab populations to the Axis cause. It was an effort which achieved very little success.

However, amongst various men of Arab origin who were recruited into the German Wehrmacht were some who ended the Second World War with experience of certain aspects of air as well as armoured warfare. They included a number of Syrians, including ex-junior officers of French colonial units. According to the Israeli aviation historian Noam Hartoch's doctoral thesis of 2015, the participation of Syrian soldiers in Luftwaffe activities was highly restricted, but several did gain first-hand experience in anti-aircraft operations while serving in the *Sonderverband* (Special Unit) 288 in North Africa. Some even volunteered for the 845th Battalion's "Arab Parachute Company" and would subsequently play a significant role in the formation of a Syrian paratrooper unit following Syrian independence.

At the end of the Second World War, Amin al-Husaini fled from Germany, through Switzerland to Egypt before reappearing in Palestine in 1946. From then on, he took an increasingly prominent role in the Palestinian Arab struggle to avoid their country being taken over by the Jewish Zionist settler movement or being dominated by Amir (subsequently King) Abdullah of Transjordan.

Sporadic disturbances and occasional violence had been seen in Palestine even during the Second World War, and this continued after the greater conflict ended. Then, on 22 June 1946, the degree and savagery of the violence suddenly increased when Zionist terrorists, members of the Irgun but apparently approved by the Haganah paramilitary (membership of such groups was not mutually exclusive), dressed as milkmen, Arab workmen and waiters, blew up the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. Ninety-one people were killed including 41 Palestinian Arabs, 28 British subjects, 17 Jews, two Armenians, one Russian, one Greek and one Egyptian. Fifty-eight other people were injured, many of them seriously.

Such was the widespread shock that the bombing of the King David Hotel caused that the Zionist settler community in Palestine, and those Jews and non-Jews who supported the Zionist cause in other parts of the world, were deeply split on the continued use of such tactics. Another 11 months would pass before significant Zionist violence and terrorism returned to Palestine.

On the other side, some members of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood were already joining the Palestinian resistance against both British occupiers and Zionist settlers as early as 1946.

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Dr. David Nicolle is a British historian specialising in the military history of the Middle Ages, with special interest in the Middle East and Arab countries. After working for BBC Arabic Service, he obtained his MA at SOAS, University of London, followed by a PhD at the University of Edinburgh. He then lectured in art history at Yarmouk University in Irbid, Jordan. Dr. Nicolle has published over 100 books about warfare ranging from Roman times to the twentieth century, mostly as sole author. He also co-authored the Arab MiGs series of books which covered the history of the Arab air forces at war with Israel from 1955 to 1973. Furthermore, he has appeared in several TV documentaries, and has published numerous articles in the specialised press.

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